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MIRAGE.

MIRAGE.

BY

GEORGE FLEMING.

AUTHOR OF "A NILE NOVEL."

In Three Volumes.

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

"IL N'EST D'AMOUR SI TRISTE QUI N'AIT SON SOUVENIR." 1

CHAPTER II.

ONE SIDE OF THE QUESTION 34

CHAPTER III.

THE OTHER SIDE 58

CHAPTER IV.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END 83

CHAPTER V.

ANOTHER STEP 110

CHAPTER VI.

PAGE

In which Mr. Lawrence reads Mérimée . 128

CHAPTER VII.

Another life 158

CHAPTER VIII.

"After three years" 186

CHAPTER IX.

The last look back 244

CHAPTER X.

Mirage 265

MIRAGE.

CHAPTER I.

"IL N'EST D'AMOUR SI TRISTE QUI N'AIT SON SOUVENIR."

AND after all they met in the bazaar. Mrs. Thayer had been buying silks. "For if Aunt Van arrives here to-morrow or next day—and Tom says there is every chance of it—I had better have all my money spent before she gets here. I don't want her to think me extravagant," she observed to Constance pensively. "If I could only decide whether scarlet or this pale-yellow was most be-

coming. And gold thread? Do you really think now gold embroidery would not look theatrical?" with a perplexed frown.

They were deep in the bazaars of Damascus—deep in those cool, dim, vaulted spaces, with the lustre of silks, the gleam of metal and porcelain about them, and the odour of gums and curious spices filling the dusty air—in a world where all the business of life is carried on in fashions and under conditions totally different from ours, and dignity, tranquillity, and splendour are jostled by strange and loathsome shapes.

"Now, *do* you think gold thread theatrical?" says Fanny with her busy frown.

Constance gave some vague answer. They were sitting upon the small bright carpet beside the attentive cross-legged merchant; and between them lay a glistening heap of fine tissues and stuffs

and silks. Opposite them another tall olive-skinned merchant, in an apple-green robe, was buying sweetmeats at a stand, on either side of which a loose white net was stretched across the shops whose owners were at prayers. A string of donkeys wandered slowly by, their trailing loads of brushwood just clearing the houses on either side; and now the gentleman in green had found an acquaintance—they stopped to speak. A low mysterious call, the imperative tap of a bronzed finger on her arm, made Constance start and look round. A barefooted Arab was standing beside her; he smiled furtively, unrolled one end of his dingy voluminous turban.

"Oh Fanny!" the girl said, catching her breath. It was a roughly-set turquoise ring, a marvel of blue.

Mrs. Thayer asked the price.

"No good man, my lady. You go ewel bazaar byme-by," the guide answered evasively. The man took back his ring with serene indifference. He thrust his hand into his breast and drew out a mass of bracelets tinkling with golden coins. "*Mafeesh?*" he sauntered away a few steps and leaned against a pillar; a ray of sunlight touched the tarnished embroidery of his dress, its white folds fell around him in straight lines; not a muscle moved; he looked as though he might have been standing there for the last thousand years.

And now a troop of white-veiled women came gliding down the dusky street, their footsteps falling noiselessly upon the beaten earth, flitting from shadow to sunlight, from gloom to gold, as dumb and vivid as a dream. And now a broad-hatted Englishman trotted by on his

donkey. He closed his umbrella before the sherbet-seller, and instantly a pet sheep, henna-stained and all crossed and barred with patches of crimson dye, rushed up and knocked it out of his hand.

"Dear me! very extraordinary animal that," said the stranger mildly, putting up his eyeglass to look reprovingly at the sheep.

Presently a beautiful Jew boy, with straight small features and scarlet lips, went sauntering past, carrying a painter's box and traps, and in a moment more the painter himself followed, a young man, and talking to Major Thayer. Something his companion said seemed to amuse him; he laughed, he took off his hat, and stood facing the wind.

"Why, Constance," said Fanny, with a sudden start—"why, good heavens! Constance, it's Mr. Lawrence."

Miss Varley looked up quietly. "I know," bending suddenly over to look at some embroidered stuff.

The two men were talking busily.

"But look here, Thayer; that's all rubbish, you know," the younger man was saying rather earnestly as they came within earshot of the ladies; "that Persian brand is all a mistake. Why, ten times out of twelve you don't even get real tobacco, and I've heard lots of fellows——"

He looked up. Mrs. Thayer was beckoning to him.

"You hav'n't quite forgotten us, I hope, Mr. Lawrence?" giving him her hand with a brilliant smile.

He made some appropriate answer.

"And you, Miss Varley," glancing rather doubtfully at the girl's grave face, "you have not forgotten——"

She did not smile in return.

"No," putting out her hand shyly, "I haven't forgotten."

Their fingers met, the colour flushing suddenly across her throat and cheek. She turned aside, pulling about the silks upon her lap with tremulous fingers.

The young man stood and looked at her a moment in silence. He was a trifle disappointed in her manner it seemed.

"We can't stop. I'm going with Lawrence to see some famous bits for sketches. I think I will begin one to-day, if the light holds out," said the Major, looking about him critically. "Lawrence is on his way to some café by the riverside. I met him by accident, and brought him here quite by force, I assure you, Fanny——"

"Oh, of course. Mrs. Thayer would know how much truth there was likely to be in that," the young man assented carelessly.

He reached out his hand and pulled down one end of a silken *cufieh.*

"You ought to buy some of those coarser Bedawy handkerchiefs, Mrs. Thayer. The colour is simply superb. And don't you like old things better? This modern stuff is all very commonplace, as poor and mechanical in design as a Roman scarf," tossing back the silk contemptuously. He glanced up and down the street, then turned again to Constance. "It is too early yet to ask you what you think of Damascus?" with a doubtful inflection in his voice.

This time she looked at him.

"I have not seen it. I think it must be the most beautiful city in the world," she said, her face lighting up with a sudden swift smile of delight.

Mr. Lawrence was very much pleased. He came and leaned against the wall beside her.

"You must have lots of news to tell me about the people at home," he said, and incontinently fell to talking about Damascus. He was going to a certain native café. "I go there very often. It isn't the sort of place to see in a crowd, you know," with an imperceptible glance towards Mrs. Thayer, "but I wish you were going there with us. I should like to have you see it as it is looking now, when there are only a few shadowy old men in the darkest corners, and the sky is growing pale and cool, and all the sunshine has gone off the river. This bazaar is stifling, but out there you will find the wind again, and the waving of trees, and the motion of running water. Perhaps, if you stay here long enough, you will hear the people at your hotel say they have been to these cafés; but that is all nonsense. They go there in mobs, and the dragomen bully

them. But now if you went there with me—— It is all cool and very silent, you know, and there are tables out on the platform above the water where one might sit——"

"Yes!" She leaned forward eagerly. "But can I go? can I go—really?"

"Well," he said laughing, "why not? If the Major is willing to take you——"

There was little or nothing to remember in all the walk which followed, but this girl remembered it all her life. She was very silent that afternoon, listening for the most part very quietly to the talk of her companions. It was more than three years since she had heard his voice!

"Are you tired? I am afraid the walk has been too much for you," the Major asked her once; and Lawrence smiled to himself at the question, for indeed there was but small suggestion of fatigue in the

still contentment of her face. And as for her—well, she was happy, as one is happy perhaps twice or thrice in a lifetime. The strange and beautiful figures about her passed and repassed like the pale figures of a dream. Once a line of heavy-laden camels went swaying by, and Lawrence laid his hand upon her arm.

"Take care!" he said.

They were standing close together for an instant, her dress brushing against him when she moved. Her arm trembled, her hands growing cold and nerveless under his touch. She looked away with sudden shyness. She had not seen him for three years!

And when they got to the café: "This is a very nice place for your sketch, you know, Major. I've done those buildings myself. But of course Miss Varley can't wait for you out here. There'll be a mob

about you before you know where you are," the young man remarked.

"Oh, of course not," said Major Thayer, good-humouredly. The old fellow was very fond of Constance. It was he who suggested to Miss Varley that they should wait for him on the wooden platform outside near the river. "I daresay Lawrence won't mind looking after you for a few minutes. I shall be right here; in the next room, you know," with sudden guilty remembrance of Fanny's injunctions.

They went out on the platform. A very old man with a black turban and a long white beard rose up and bowed gravely at their entrance.

"That is an old acquaintance of mine. An Armenian merchant. He has been giving me lessons in Persian of late; I daresay he is waiting for me now," nodding to him carelessly as they passed. "Sit

here. I am going to order some Damascene sweetmeats for you. You know you were always as fond as a baby of sweets——"

"But I don't want to keep you from your lesson," the girl said shyly.

"And if I want to be kept?"

"I see a rose—the first rose of the season. Summer has come," she said incoherently, bending suddenly forward to look at the full and silent stream.

The water rushed swiftly by without a ripple or a sound; only the delicate-footed wind kept up a low continuous murmuring amongst the deep water-splashed foliage of the trees, and high up above them a single palm leaned in full sunlight from a garden-wall.

"It is such a beautiful world!" the girl said suddenly, looking up with a level radiant glance.

"I should like to make a drawing of

you some day," Lawrence told her presently. "You will pose for me some time? and are you going to stay? You have told me nothing of your plans."

"Aunt Van is coming. One can't have Aunt Van and settled plans at the same time, you know," with a careless laugh. "But you, Mr. Lawrence? You never used to have plans once, I know," resting her cheek upon her hand, and looking at him frankly.

Mr. Lawrence did not answer for a few minutes. Some chance turn of her head or hand, some faltering inflection in her voice had struck him with a sudden flash of recollection, evoking another face from out the past. The likeness troubled him.

"I? my plans?" he repeated absently. "I had nearly decided to go to Constantinople, but now——"

"Now?" catching her breath anxiously.

He frowned slightly, still keeping his eyes fixed upon the river.

"I have an idea for a picture—— You remember that talk we had about my painting once? I have often thought of what you said that day. It is enough to make a man stick to his work at any cost to have been believed in in that fashion," turning to her with one of his rare sudden smiles.

She could hardly trust herself to speak about that past, she remembered it all so well. But he alluded to it constantly—lightly, easily, with a blurring over of details, a confusion of names and dates she invariably noted, and without comment.

"It scarcely seems three years ago, does it?" he said to her once. "What have you been doing all that time? You have not changed in the least," looking at her with slow scrutiny.

"I have been living at home," said Constance simply. "I think I have done nothing but read. You said—— I remember somebody told me once that women never read anything through. I don't think anyone could say that of me —now," with a low happy laugh.

There was nothing especial, nothing to remember in all that silent idle afternoon, and yet they both remembered it.

"It is so long since I have seen anyone to speak to beside a lot of men. I am really very glad you have come," said Lawrence. "While I am here you must let me show you something of the city; there are lots of out-of-the-way places where I can take you—you and the Major and Mrs. Thayer."

"Jack—Mr. Stuart is travelling with us," said Constance abruptly.

She had utterly forgotten his existence until that moment.

Mr. Lawrence was looking at her with attention.

"Mr. Stuart? ah yes. Ferris told me that he was — that he was with you."

He got up and stood leaning over the balustrade, looking down at the water. He put out his hand and plucked a rose from the trellis beside him.

"You know the story about roses?" he said, crumpling the crimson petals in his hand.

"The story——?"

"It is part of an Arabian love-song," said Lawrence, absently. "How, when Eve was driven out of Eden she lingered outside at the closed gate praying the angels for a single flower to carry with her into exile. And the angel looked at her, and because she was so exceeding fair he threw her out a single red rose— a rose of Paradise. And ever since that

day every descendant of Eve, at some time of his life — and once — has smelt the perfume of that flower, and after that — after that and until he dies — well! There are earthly roses, fortunately," looking down with an odd expression at the crumpled flower.

"You are crushing it," said Constance, putting out her hand.

He did not see the gesture. The old Armenian merchant had been watching them with patient gravity since they entered. When Lawrence moved he laid down his pipe and stood up. He approached them now and bowed, standing deferentially aside and not looking at Constance.

"You will excuse me, Miss Varley," the young man said, "if I leave you an instant to speak to Ahmed?"

And then as they were talking together

he took out his pocket-book to look over some notes, and as he held it open in his hand the wind caught up a crumpled piece of paper and threw it at Miss Varley's feet.

The young man rejoined her again in a moment; he was looking rather annoyed.

"I told you old Ahmed was a merchant, didn't I? Well, he is going almost immediately. His caravan is nearly ready now; he starts for Bagdad within three days."

She answered nothing to this. Old Ahmed and his movements were equally indifferent to her.

"But, oh Mr. Lawrence," she said suddenly, "is not this paper yours? I picked it up——"

He took it from her and looked at it. It was the letter he had been reading an hour or two before.

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"But, oh Mr. Lawrence," she said suddenly, "is not this paper yours? I picked it up——"

He took it from her and looked at it. It was the letter he had been reading an hour or two before.

"Yes, it is mine," he said in a low voice, and after a slight pause. He held it in his hand in an undecided way for a minute or two, then tore it deliberately across into strips and flung them into the river.

"Do you know what sort of a thing is a protested note, Miss Varley?"

"No."

"Well, that was one," pointing to the fragments and speaking in a harder voice than she had ever heard him use before. "There are natures," he went on presently, "so absolutely truthful that they make every wilful fascination seem tawdry as a stage jewel in comparison. It is fresh air and sunshine after 'the perfumed shade of the forbidden tree.' One respects such natures, Miss Varley," looking at her with a great expression of liking in his eyes.

By this time the Major had finished

his picture. He came in, holding it in his hand, and very much pleased.

"Not so bad, not so bad, I think, eh Lawrence?" contemplating the sketch fondly at arm's-length. He glanced about him curiously. "So this is the sort of place you talk about, is it? Nice sort of place for a hot day, perhaps. I don't see much in it myself. You are coming to dine with us to-night, my boy? Nonsense! but you must. Mrs. Thayer told me to bring you; and we don't disobey orders, do we, Constance? Hollo! you've lost your rose," pointing to some scattered petals on the floor.

"Mr. Lawrence never gave it to me," said Constance.

When they reached the hotel the first person they saw was Jack Stuart, leaning against the door-post, smoking. He threw away his cigar and took off his hat as

Constance approached him, but otherwise he did not trouble himself to move.

"Hollo, Jack. Why, where have you been? and what have you been doing with yourself?" said the Major.

"I've been amusing myself," said Jack shortly. It seemed an unsuccessful form of entertainment by his voice.

"You ought to have been with us. Lawrence took us to a café, and—let me see; I think you must remember having met Mr. Lawrence?"

The two young men looked up at each other and nodded distantly.

"I saw you at The Farm, I think?"

"I believe so," said Denis carelessly.

They went into the courtyard together; the light was stronger here than in the narrow street. When they reached the fountain, Stuart turned and looked with keen attention first at Lawrence and then

at the girl. He was a shrewd observer of faces, and something in her attitude as they came up the street, some slight expression of languor in the proud and erect carriage, the turn of her head, the shy swift smile with which she answered some chance remark of her companion—nothing, everything—had struck him with some sudden intimation of the truth. "But proving nothing," he told himself, "proving nothing," looking down at the plashing water with a quick nervous shiver, as though the summer night had suddenly grown cold.

"My glove, please, Mr. Stuart. It is there by your foot," said Constance, turning. Her voice too had changed; it was gentle as ever, but tremulous, vibrating with the same baffling intangible sense of change. He stooped and handed her the glove, looking straight into her eyes

as he did so. The colour shifted uneasily upon her cheek.

"It is some lover's quarrel," thought Lawrence, curiously, watching them with coldly critical eyes. He took the Major by the arm. "You have never finished that story about old Johnson? I have not seen him since we were in the hospital together—Swearing Johnson we used to call him there," turning aside to leave the others freer. And it might have been the Major's story which brought that look upon his face.

The twilight deepened into darkness, a cool and odorous darkness, full of faint scent of flowers and the sound of water falling. The wind was hushed; the lamp hardly flickered by the doorway, but from time to time the small new leaves overhead rustled suddenly and were still.

They were sitting out in the courtyard

after dinner, all of them—sitting or lying upon the cushions of the divan, and Davenant was at Miss Varley's feet. There was something about this girl which appealed irresistibly to the young man's imagination—a simple largeness of line and joyousness of nature and repose. "She is as fresh and harmonious and passionless as the early morning," he said one day quite seriously to Ferris. And now, as they lounged in the uncertain moonlight — for now the young crescent moon had climbed above the tree-tops, and the thread of water glistened, the fig-leaf shadows fell upon the marble floor —the charm of her personality possessed him; he offered her a secret homage of sentiment as delicate and elusive as those shadows.

Her fan had fallen to the ground; he opened it wide and held it up against the moonlight.

"I wrote some verses for your fan, for your Japanese fan, the other day," he said dreamily; and after a moment, and as no one answered, he began to repeat some lines, half to himself, and in a low and singularly well modulated voice:

A flowery fan for a white flower hand
(*White cranes flying across the moon*)—
A breath of wind from a windless land—
A breath in the breathless noon.
Flowers that blossom—a wind that blows
(*White cranes sailing across the sky*)—
A sigh for the light love, the love that goes,
A flower for the loves that die!

"Very pretty," said Fanny, as he finished, "very pretty indeed. But I'm afraid you will think me sadly stupid for asking, and indeed it is hardly a fair question to ask, but what did you intend it to mean, Mr. Davenant?"

"Ah, but I never explain things," said Davenant, in his most languid tone.

There was an awkward silence, broken at last by the Major's voice, inquiring of Lawrence if he knew what had become of their old regimental chaplain.

"Oh, he gave up the army, and went to Paris after the war. He is more High Church than ever now, and has an especial day for hearing young ladies confess. I heard about him only the other day," said Lawrence carelessly, "and curiously enough, I heard of him from a man he had just converted."

The Major laughed.

"May I ask what there is so curious in that?" said Mrs. Thayer, rather sharply.

"Well," rejoined Lawrence very calmly, "perhaps there is not much in it after all. Tom was only remembering some old story about our chaplain—the Infant Samuel, the soldiers called him. I don't throw

any doubt upon the man's conversion myself, you will please observe. Indeed, I think it highly probable. He is by no means the first man who has been saved by the voice of a humble preacher since the days when Balaam was saved by the voice of an ass."

"Oh!" said Fanny blankly.

And then a moment later: "Constance dear, it is really growing quite chilly, and I see you have no wrap," she said softly. "Don't you think it is time to leave the gentlemen to their cigars—and their stories?"

"Mrs. Thayer, if you mean me, I am mute from this time henceforth," said Lawrence laughing.

Mr. Stuart sprang up: "I will fetch Constance a shawl," glad of any excuse for doing something. He came back in a moment. "This is yours, I think?"

he said, but he did not offer to put the wrap about her, and it was Ferris who took it out of his hand.

"Mr. Stuart has exhibited his taste. You should always wear white, Miss Varley," said Lawrence, "soft flexible white things like this," taking up a corner of the drapery. It was almost the first time he had spoken to her that evening, and she turned to him at once with a soft sudden stir of pleasure.

"Yes," she answered simply, drawing the shawl more closely about her.

The moon had long since vanished behind the dark and rustling trees; the sky was pale and starlit and very silent.

"A night for music," said Davenant, "for the sound of falling water, and the clear notes of stringed instruments, and song."

"You used to sing once upon a time, Lawrence?"

"Oh yes, do," said Mrs. Thayer suavely. She had a strong antipathy to Lawrence.

The young man hesitated a moment; he looked up at Constance. "I don't know," he began doubtfully; and then, as still she did not speak, he moved slightly, and leaning on his elbow, looking up at the pale luminous sky above him, and in a clear and singularly flexible voice, he began to sing:

Wie heisst König Ringang's Töchterlein?
Rohtraut, Schön-Rohtraut!

In the faint half-light Stuart could see the girl start and lean forward at the first familiar notes; but what could he, what could any of them know of the deep and passionate sadness and longing which filled her heart at the sound of those old and unforgotten words?

Darauf sie ritten schweigend heim,
Rohtraut, Schön-Rohtraut!

Es jauchzt der Knab' in seinem Sinn ;
Und würdst du heute Kaiserin
Mich sollst nicht Kränken :
Ihr tausend Blätter im Walde wisst
Ich hab' Schön-Rohtraut's Mund geküsst—
Schweig stille, mein Herz, schweig still !

He had begun carelessly enough, but as the sentiment of the lines touched his imagination, his voice deepened and gained in tone. The last words were given with a curious and passionate restraint, and as he ended—and for a moment no one spoke —only the splash of the fountain sounded through the silence.

"That is a very old song, you know," he said at last, turning to Constance.

"I remember it," the girl said quickly; and then, as Mrs. Thayer moved, she too arose, and they all walked on together towards the house.

The "Good-nights" were said at the foot of the stairway leading to the upper gallery surrounding the court.

"Good-night, Constance dear," said Mrs. Thayer, leaning over this balustrade.

The girl was waiting while Lawrence lighted her candle.

"Well, Constance, good-night," said the Major, turning to follow the young men to the door.

A lamp was burning at the foot of the staircase; its light shone full upon her face. She was strangely pale, and her eyes were dewy and dark with emotion; they glistened in the light as she took her candle from Denis.

"Good-night, Mr. Lawrence," she said shyly. She went up a step or two and looked back at him, "Good-night!"

The young man started. "Won't you give me your hand?" he said. He just touched her fingers. "Good-night, Constance."

She lifted her eyes for an instant and

looked at him. Without another word she turned and went slowly up the stairs. Her room fronted the street. The window was open and the flickering flare of a street-lamp streamed redly in as she entered. She locked the door behind her, and set her candle down upon the table. A mirror hung before her; she leaned both hands upon the table, she looked long and earnestly at the reflection in the tarnished frame.

"After three years!" she said aloud.

The sound of her own voice startled her. She gazed fixedly at the face in the glass, and, as she gazed, a wave of happy colour swept over her delicate cheek.

"Good-night, Constance, you happy Constance!" she whispered under her breath. Her face burned; she put up her hands before it. She leaned over with a sudden motion and blew out the light.

CHAPTER II.

ONE SIDE OF THE QUESTION.

MEANWHILE the young men had gathered about the street-door; they were talking and lighting their pipes. It was rather late that evening to go anywhere, would not Mr. Stuart come round to their lodgings with them and have something, Mr. Ferris suggested politely. There was some very fair Lebanon wine.

"Oh, bother the rooms!" said Davenant quickly; "come round to the café and hear some native music."

"The dancing-girls here were not worth looking at after Cairo," Mr. Lawrence remarked confidentially to his cigar.

"Thank you," said Stuart stiffly, "I'm engaged;" and there was an intentional emphasis of refusal in his manner which made the others turn and stare.

"Well," began Davenant, as Jack walked off, "well, of all the cheeky——"

"Be quiet," said Ferris, in a stage whisper. "Perhaps," he went on aloud, "we may be more fortunate with you than with your cousin, Major?"

As for Stuart, he went down by the river, he sat on the parapet of the bridge and stared at the dark swift water rushing by through the night, with the dumbness of baffled desire in a nature which knew no expression for itself but action. All the strong common sense, which was the dominant quality in the young man's

character, warned him against the encroaching influence of Constance.

"If I can't do anything else I can go away," he thought desperately. "I'll go away and leave her," taking up a stone and flinging it savagely at the nearest pariah dog. The animal limped away with a sharp yelp of discomfiture, and even in the depths of his misery the young man could not restrain a smile. It died away as suddenly as it had come. He turned back towards the hotel. There was a light still shining in her room as he came down the street; but even as he turned to look at it again a shadow moved quickly across the curtain, and the candle was blown out.

The courtyard was empty and quiet enough when he reached it. He met no one on his way to his room but a sleepy servant, who sprang up from the mat on

which he was dreaming to salute the young man gravely as he passed. The others had long since gone their different ways.

"Oh, come along and take a walk, Lawrence," Davenant had suggested, as they passed down the narrow street.

Ferris laughed. "I believe you two fellows never sleep at all," he said with lazy amusement. And so the young men parted.

It was a quiet and very beautiful night. They strolled along the river's bank for some distance beyond the town. The sky overhead was pale and luminous with the wan radiance of the stars, and out here in the open fields the world seemed larger; the damp wind from the water blew more freshly about them.

"Ah," said Davenant, "this was indeed worth coming for;" taking off his hat and letting the breeze play coolly about his

bared forehead and throat. He threw himself down on the short close grass by the river's brink. "Sit down, Lawrence, won't you?"

They sat there a long time in silence, listening to the water's stealthy flow. The river poured by them through the open fields, dark and mobile and dumb.

"Black as the waters of accursed Styx," said Davenant dreamily. He turned, leaning upon his elbow: "Lawrence!"

"I hear."

"That girl is in love with you," abruptly.

Mr. Lawrence did not answer for a moment. "If you mean that for a joke, Davenant——"

"A joke! I? and on such a night, in this divine silence? I would as soon —I would as soon think of writing a parody on the 'Antigone,'" the young man said indignantly. And then, as Denis did not

answer: "I said that girl was in love with you," he repeated placidly; "and so she is. I don't think she knows it, though. I hope she won't find it out, myself. You would not wish her to, either, if you could only have seen the divine melancholy in her eyes while you were singing. I thought of Shelley's 'Prometheus':

> Thine eyes are like the deep, blue, boundless heaven
> Contracted to two circles underneath,
> Their long fine lashes, dark, far, measureless,
> Orb within orb, and line through line enwoven.

And then, don't you remember? Panthea asks:

> Why lookest thou as if a spirit passed?

No, I hope that she will never know that she has loved you."

Lawrence moved uneasily.

"I don't know whether you are aware of it, my boy, but you are certainly talking

greater rubbish than usual, it seems to me," forcing a careless laugh.

He took up a stone and flung it into the water.

"Miss Varley—and I only say it to put a stop to a—a ridiculous discussion into which her name should not be brought —Miss Varley is engaged to be married to Stuart," bringing out the last words with great distinctness.

"Well?" said Davenant simply.

The reply staggered him.

"Well—why, man, don't you understand English? She is engaged to be married, I tell you; has been in love with the fellow for years for all I know to the contrary; and then, because she listens to a beautiful song, with some human sentiment, you want me to believe—— You might as well tell me I was in love with Mrs. Thayer," with a short laugh.

"Mrs. Thayer," said Davenant seriously, "is a very pretty woman. She reminds me of nothing so much as of a paper doll. I can see no use for natures of that quality in the world, if it is not to serve to heighten and intensify, by force of contrast, the divine anguish of thinkers and poets. Yes, they have their use, perhaps, after all. But as for Miss Varley—are all her people Americans, Lawrence?"

"No; I don't know."

"Because it would be an interesting fact to verify. As a mere matter of opinion, I feel convinced she has European blood in her. Perhaps on her mother's side?"

"I don't know," said Mr. Lawrence.

"You see," said Davenant, thoughtfully, "the few American women I have known impressed me rather differently. It's a commonplace to say that they lack senti-

ment, but a commonplace fact. They are lovely, but they have no hold upon the imagination; their very beauty affects me like the keen and brilliant sunshine of a windy day. Now, Miss Varley—to go back to what we were saying—you're not asleep, Lawrence?"

"No."

"Miss Varley is quite different. When I look at that girl and realise the beautiful artistic capacity for suffering, and for deep passionate emotion in that nature, and then—when I look at Mr. Stuart and reflect upon the hideously comfortable and *bourgeois* happiness he will stifle her under—Lawrence," said Davenant, raising himself up and speaking with a mournful solemnity, "I feel as though I were seeing some piece of rare and exquisite Venetian glass—some thin, priceless, wave-tinted marvel of beauty—given over into the hands of a German

beer-drinker. I feel as though I were witnessing a sacrilege."

"Oh, come now," said Lawrence sharply, "Stuart isn't a bad fellow in his way."

"Bad? oh dear no. He's quite incapable of badness, poor devil!" said Davenant, with serene compassion. "He hasn't even the consciousness of his superb brute force. Think of the calm sweet exultation of a Greek in such perfection of physical power! And he! I was looking at him this evening; why the fellow does not even know how handsome he is," with a faint smile of contempt.

"Ah well, other people are not so blind, perhaps," Lawrence suggested with a short laugh. He rolled over and leaned his face upon his hands, looking down at the swift moving darkness below him. The very silence of the night seemed full of remem-

brance and subtle suggestion. He moved uneasily. "You are ready to go home, Davenant?"

"I was thinking," the young man said dreamily, "if I were richer, and ten years older, I should marry Miss Varley myself."

"*You* marry Miss Varley!"

"Oh, there are objections, I know." He spoke placidly, and precisely in the manner with which he would have discussed some old picture. "There are many other emotions I wish to experience before I marry—emotions absolutely essential to the artistic consummation of a life. I was thinking more of Miss Varley when I spoke. And yet, do you know, I can quite well imagine that Mr. Stuart wuold be an agreeable lover? He's a good-natured creature, and very pleasant to look at, and love—modern love I mean—not the fatal demoniac possession of the Greek poets,

but the love of these latter days—sad with insatiable desire, faint with pity, and overshadowed with the awful sense of its own import and brevity—the modern passion of love," said Mr. Davenant reflectively, "is, to my thinking, like the mirage of the desert—a semblance, a reflection of far-off beauty cast upon shifting sands."

"You have tried it, of course?" said Lawrence dryly.

"And in all probability," Davenant continued—he did not pay the smallest attention to the interruption—"in all probability they will be married, and be as disgustingly contented with the polite inanities of life as all the other members of society one knows. Still, I don't know, I have some hope for Miss Varley."

"Some hope that she may be picturesquely miserable, perhaps?"

"A hope that this unconscious love of

hers—and I really can assure you that the higher part of that girl's nature is in love with you, Lawrence—a hope, I say, that this love may prove a saving influence in her future life—a beautiful grave in which she will keep her soul, as in a place out of sight—a holy place, 'full of the sound of the sorrow of years.' I think, in your place, I should not have allowed that"—mildly—"and yet perhaps you are right. It may be one of those sublime sacrifices to self which art demands. Your life is formed already, and it might be very fatal to a man's artistic development to marry young, don't you think?"

Mr. Lawrence did not answer. He was quietly stretched out on the grass listening. No other man alive would have been allowed to speak to him in this fashion, he thought; but this boy, Davenant, Claude—why, his very unconsciousness of

offence privileged him. He lay there a few minutes longer, quite motionless. Perhaps he was waiting to hear if Davenant had no more to say; but as the younger man remained silent, he got up presently with some inarticulate exclamation and walked away. Davenant let him go without a word.

He walked on restlessly. It was a warm still night, but he shivered nervously as he flung himself down beside the river, pressing both hands before his face, with a resolute effort to think it over calmly and dispassionately—this strange revelation he had heard.

And, to begin with, what truth was there in it? At another time he might have scoffed at the very idea, passing it over as the idle chatter of a romantic boy; but here, to-night, with the recollection of the look she had given him still

vividly before him—no, it was not all a jest!—with a sudden curious thrill of excitement. He was not in the least in love with Constance. No! He asked himself the question gravely, and the answer was still the same. In love! Why up to this morning he had quite forgotten the girl's existence. And she had been a child when he had known her before—a mere child—and then to suppose that she would have remembered him all these years! It was preposterous, looking up with a half-apologetic smile at his own folly.

He got up, humming an air carelessly, and pacing to and fro along the path between the thin dark trees.

He thrust his hand in his pocket and took out his pipe. A quiet smoke would set him all right, perhaps. He was nervous, uneasy. "There must be thunder in the air," looking about him curiously.

The starry sky overhead was clear and bare of clouds. The sleeping city lay dark, huddled, and silent at his feet. The river flowed between him and the houses, flowed noiseless and shadowy between the ramparts of its banks. There was nothing stirring in these wide open fields—nothing but the damp river-wind touching his face like a caress.

He let his hand drop irresolutely to his side. What did this boy know of the real needs of men and women? "*This world and life's too big to pass for a dream,*" he muttered to himself, passing his hand impatiently across his face. But was it a dream?

All day long he seemed to have been under the influence of some inexplicable emotion—something of too impalpable a nature to be grasped and throttled and thrust away; and Davenant's words seemed

only to have given the phantom form and substance, and yet—— It was absurd. He ought not to think of it. He would not think of it.

He sat down beside the bank again and looked moodily at the water. Well, granted the worst, granted that she was in love with him—unconsciously in love had Davenant said?—what then? There was this Stuart she was engaged to marry—a pleasant manly fellow—Davenant abused him, to be sure; but then, what did that signify? Claude was full of these odd dislikes. A man whom all her friends approved of; a good match too, he believed—trying to remember some story he had heard about Stuart's father. Yes, a good match, and madly in love with her, that was easy enough to see. A suitable marriage in every way, his reason told him. And as for Miss Varley—well! granting

again the girl had had some other fancy, why, women got over these fancies in time —they got over most things—with a cold smile.

Ordinary women—yes; but Constance? The sweet grave face rose up before him distinctly—a face as loyal and simple as a child's. She had always seemed to him the most absolutely truthful creature he had ever known, this little friend of his, thinking of her with a touch of tenderness as of a child. But was it a child's face that had looked into his on the stairs that night? In that one brief glance he seemed to have read all the passion of surrender of a human soul. He thought of it now with a certain reticence, with a sense of profanation, a chivalric respect for the woman's heart she had betrayed. He could soon turn this sentiment into love if he liked—he could do that—with a sudden flash of troubled

delight; but who was he to do it? The young noble figure seemed to his imagination like one moving apart, looking down with beautiful ignorant eyes upon the turmoil and stain of life; and was it for him to bring her down to its level? And then the thought would come again—he did not love her. No. A whole world of dead desires, "old memories, faiths infirm and dead," seemed lying deep between him and the glance of those tender wistful eyes. But she was a good girl — very good—poor little Constance!

And then, for the first time in years, he thought long and steadily of his wife, going back over the old story with grave compassion and regret. And, good God! how little he had missed her! He thought how he had seen her that last day, full of eager demands and fancies—jealous, poor child! of his very mother's love. Her

life seemed to have gone out suddenly—a mere pebble tossed into the sea; gone down, out of sight. Lawrence was not what is technically called a religious man, but he had something of the soul, something of the sensitive imagination of a poet. He looked up now with a sudden passionate appeal at that mute and fatal sky.

The after years came back to him, in that strange unfamiliar hush before the dawn—one after one the fruitless years came back with question of their use. One after one the years of his early youth returned. He saw himself again a boy at home; a young man facing life—eager, expectant, self-reliant—ready to answer to any call, full of all generous enthusiasm and purpose; and all this but such a short time ago! And how could it have been otherwise? He was not a man ad-

dicted to morbid self-study — the very inherent logic of his French blood would have saved him from that; but to-night he seemed, as never before, to look back upon his past experience as on an inevitable and fatal progress from the delight of desire to the quiet acceptance of defeat. For these were things which were over for him now.

He looked the fact steadily in the face—saw it as any other practical man could have done—unbiassed by its relation to himself. It was over—looking up gravely—and Constance, perhaps, all unconscious, had saved him from the greatest mistake of his life. A vestal virgin—with a quiet smile at Davenant's fancy—a vestal virgin rescuing another's existence by the mere fact of her own serene presence.

He got up from his place and walked slowly back to where he had left Davenant.

The lad had fallen asleep by the river. One arm was thrown back under his head, and his pale, large-featured face was uncovered to the sky. He was sleeping as quietly as a tired boy. Lawrence did not awaken him. He stood looking down at him a moment, listening to his peaceful breathing. How many other fellows he had seen lying just so on those old battle-fields at the South. Men who had given their lives for something, while he——

And there were chances for him yet—yes, chances. He had plenty of talent; something of the old hunger for work coming back at the thought.

He sat down presently, clasping his hands behind his head and staring up above him at the paling stars. Yes, a vestal. Davenant was right. The day might come perhaps when he should tell her of it. It should come, if she chose;

an eager smile coming over his mouth and eyes. If she chose. And if not —well, the child's life would not have been disturbed for nothing; and she should never know. There should never be a word to bring a look of trouble into that grave, sweet, innocent face.

The brief southern night had been waning while he pondered. Already there was a breath of morning in the blue-gray air about him; the sky was paling; the river ran more blackly across the open fields, with here and there the glitter of a star upon its rapid current. In the last few minutes the light had been creeping steadily all about him. The trees on the hillside began to detach themselves one by one from the confused mass of their fellows. The far-off mountain-peaks were growing darker, the colour was faintly stealing back across the meadows, and

already a hint of yellow light was stirring in the eastern sky.

The wind was growing chilly with the dawn.

"Wake up, Davenant," Lawrence said; "you can't sleep here any longer, old fellow," bending over and touching the other's arm.

"Hollo, what's the row?" said Davenant, springing to his feet.

The other man laughed.

"You haven't caught cold, my boy?" laying his hand kindly on the lad's shoulder.

"Why, what did you wake me for?" Davenant asked, looking about him with a bewildered air. "Why, Lawrence, the morning hasn't come?"

And Lawrence, too, looked about him confidently.

"It will be morning soon," he said.

CHAPTER III.

THE OTHER SIDE.

THE next morning, at about eleven o'clock, Major Thayer's dragoman, Hassan, was quietly sitting in the entrance of the hotel, smoking a nargileh. He had not long since returned from the bazaar, whither he had accompanied his party, leaving them safely in the hands of "one very good guide," when a stress of important business absolutely necessitated his departure; and now, as he sat in the cool and quiet courtyard, puffing meditatively at his pipe, and from time to time con-

sulting the rows of figures in his private account-book, a gentle satisfaction was slowly creeping over his anxious and weather-beaten countenance; he looked with benign indifference in the faces of the passers-by.

He might have been sitting in this way for perhaps a quarter of an hour, when a sudden and unaccustomed sound disturbed the dignified silence of the street, and a moment after a cumbersome travelling-carriage rolled slowly into sight. Hassan looked at it with some attention.

"It is Mahmoud the son of Abdallah, Mahmoud of Beyrout," he said to himself presently, as the equipage drew near enough for him to distinguish the features of the gaudily-dressed individual on the box beside the coachman; nor did the old man move or look up again as the

horses drew up with a flourish before the hotel-door.

The new-comers were three in number—two ladies, and a tall elderly man dressed in black with a white scarf about his hat, who got out first, accepting Mahmoud's proffered help with a certain awkwardness, and then waving him aside and turning slowly and stiffly to assist the ladies out. The first to descend was a small active-looking woman, with short high-kilted skirts, and a girl's hat pushed back from the faded eager face.

"Dear me, Edwin, is this the hotel?" she demanded. "Why, I thought it was an old palace. I'm sure the guide-book says so. Dear me! And is this man smoking, the landlord? We want three rooms—front rooms—and a *salon* and—— What, not the landlord? Where *is* the landlord, then?" turning sharply to Hassan.

"The man Mahmoud attends to that, my dear," the tall man in black remarked slowly.

And at the same moment the lady in the carriage looked around. "My dear Mrs. Gard, pray do not give yourself the trouble. Mahmoud will make all those arrangements for me, and—oh, Mahmoud, *voulez-vous prenez*—the—ah, the basket, you know," pointing to a silken roll upon the seat before her. "My little pet is fast asleep still," patting the bundle with her plump and well-gloved hand.

But by this time the news of the arrival had spread all over the house; the turbaned landlord appeared, bowing in grave welcome, and half-a-dozen servants began taking out the various rugs, fur cloaks, and cushions with which the carriage was filled. The lady followed last of all, her short fat person almost disappearing

under the voluminous character of her wraps.

"You will inquire if Major Thayer is in the house, Mahmoud," she said, slipping her hand under Mrs. Gard's thin arm.

"Yes, my lady."

"And order tea."

"Yes, my lady."

"And—ah, yes—the basket. I cannot bear to have the poor darling out of my sight. I am sure that if he waked he would miss me," turning with a complacent smile to Mr. Gard.

"I was not aware," that gentleman began slowly, "I was not previously aware that the animals belonging to this species——"

"Beg your pardons, gentleman," said Hassan, rising gravely, "but I think you ask Major Thayer? The Major my gentleman."

"Ah," said the last comer, looking at him with some interest, "you are Major Thayer's dragoman, then. Very curious he should not find anything more useful for you to do. Go at once and tell him I am waiting for him, if you please: Mrs. Van Ness—you will not forget the name."

She turned and mounted the stair, still leaning upon Mrs. Gard. The rooms which had been assigned to her were in the front of the house. "The best there are, I suppose?" she said, looking about her critically; "it does not make much difference for a day or two. I shall not remain here longer. And—oh, very well, Mahmoud; put the basket down there, in the sun. Excuse me, Mrs. Gard, but if you would not mind moving—I am sure my little pet will enjoy that chair. And—Mahmoud!"

"My lady?"

"Go," said Mrs. Van Ness, sinking down upon the sofa, "go at once, *at once*, you understand—and find Major Thayer. And tell the man below I shall not need the carriage."

"Yes, my lady," said Mahmoud, bowing and shutting the door so respectfully and noiselessly behind him that Mrs. Van Ness could not repress an approving smile. "That poor creature quite worships me. I call it touching to see that kind of devotion in a common person," she observed languidly. There was a tacit war going on between Mrs. Gard and the dragoman. She looked up grimly now, setting her pale coarse lips more firmly together. "I do not believe it," she said.

Meanwhile the subject of these remarks was passing with the utmost deliberation through the courtyard where Hassan was

still smoking in the shade, and talking to the driver.

"Well?" said the latter, looking up with some anxiety.

"Oh, you had better wait," remarked the younger dragoman carelessly. "She may not use you, but she pays all the same." He turned to Hassan. "You beautiful boy is well, God willing?" with a grave inclination of his supple and sumptuously-clad figure.

"My son," said the old man slowly, "is well; may God avert the omen! He will be better, oh Mahmoud, when thy father hath repaid me for those stores."

There was a moment's silence.

"My father is an old man," said Mahmoud presently; "his beard is white."

"They were English stores," said Hassan slowly, "potted meats and pickles."

"The season has been bad."

"Forty bottles of pickles," said Hassan, looking at his pipe, "and the preserved meat of the howadji."

"My father will try the case with you, for know that there are law-courts in Beyrout, oh Hassan."

"What," said the old man, with a sneer, "has the cadi then ceased to be thine uncle?"

Mahmoud did not seem to have heard this remark. He drew an embroidered pouch from his belt, and began rolling a cigarette between his dexterous yellow fingers.

They smoked for several moments without speaking.

"Do your howadji stay here long?" he asked finally, a conciliating smile creeping over his insolent and servile face.

"God knows."

"My lady is a great American princess.

The money flies from her hands like the sand before the wind. But God hath visited her with the curse of the Englishman; she cannot remain still. If," said Mahmoud suddenly, "thy howadji remain, she too will tarry in Damascus the blest; and if she tarries thou shalt be paid, oh Hassan, thy just debt, yes, and something over."

Hassan looked up: "The debt in full?"

"By the beard of the prophet!"

The old man took off his fez and passed his hand through his venerable gray hair. "Mashallah. In the name of God, so be it!" he said solemnly.

It was nearly twelve o'clock when Constance returned from the bazaar. She went up to her room; the door was open, and Fanny was standing before the mirror, looking at herself with an expression of deep anxiety.

"Why, what's the matter, dear?" the girl asked, stopping in the doorway.

"Constance," said Mrs. Thayer, impressively, "Aunt Van has arrived."

"Aunt Van? When? Where is she? I'll go and see her."

"She has been here perhaps an hour," said Fanny mournfully, "and she has brought a clergyman and his wife with her, my dear—people she picked up on the way, I suppose; and she has got a tame lizard in a basket; and she has made me pull this hat to pieces and change my way of dressing my hair."

Constance laughed.

"Where is she? You make Aunt Van twice as unreasonable by being so afraid of her, Fanny. Now she never does those things to me. Poor old auntie!"

"Poor old—— Well!" with a resigned sigh, "she is waiting for you, you know."

And then, as Constance still lingered in the doorway, "That dress becomes you; you are looking very well to-day," said Fanny thoughtfully. And indeed, within these last two days, the girl's large and noble beauty had seemed to awaken into new colour and life, blossoming out like a rose that feels the stirring of the summer about its secret and folded leaves. There was a change in her face too—a look of dependence; something more childish and yielding in the expression of the proud-cut mouth. "A handsome girl," Fanny thought, looking after her critically; "a little larger than I like to see a woman though," with true American distrust of flesh and blood.

Mrs. Gard too looked curiously and attentively at Constance as she entered her aunt's room. Mrs. Van Ness had all the garrulity of a selfish woman, and it is probable that her present companion knew

somewhat more about Miss Varley's private affairs than that young lady ever imagined. She came in now with rather a pleased look upon her face.

"Well, Aunt Van!"

Mrs. Van Ness was standing beside the window. She turned and embraced her niece with effusion, with a lingering pressure to her ample bosom, a soft rustle of silks, a faint scattering of familiar perfume on the air which carried Constance back to the very earliest associations of her childhood.

"Ah," she said, pressing her warm plump hand heavily upon the girl's shoulder, "ah, my dear, I am so very glad you have come at last. It seems quite romantic meeting you here. Fanny has told me everything. I have a thousand things to ask you."

Here Mrs. Gard got up and left the room.

"You remember her, of course? The

clergyman's wife at Bellevue. A good creature and perfectly devoted to me. She cannot bear the courier; and if you knew the trouble I have between the two! Why, they are both as jealous about me—— It's quite touching, I assure you," said Mrs. Van Ness languidly. She sank back upon the sofa. "You have not told me what you think of my lizard, Constance."

Miss Varley turned and looked at the animal in question, who was sunning himself complacently upon a cushion on the floor.

"It seems so like home to see you with your pets, Aunt Van."

"He is such a romantic little darling, I could not live without him. I am quite devoted to him. Mahmoud got him for me this morning at Beyrout. He nearly bit Mr. Gard's finger off on the way down here; the poor dear man is so clumsy."

"I don't remember Mr. Gard," said Constance.

"Why, the clergyman at Bellevue, my dear; the man who had sunstroke. You are looking very well yourself, Constance. Come here, and sit by me. Fanny has told me all about Mr. Stuart, you know," said Mrs. Van Ness suddenly. "I know old Mr. Stuart. My dear husband used to bank with him; and I congratulate you, my dear," patting her niece approvingly upon the shoulder.

"Aunt Van——"

"There, my dear, there. You need say nothing more about it. I understand," said the little lady on the sofa, with a gracious and patronising air. "It is true that at one time I had other views for you, Constance; but, taking everything altogether——"

"This is really too absurd," said the

girl, getting up impatiently and nearly knocking over the lizard. "My dear Aunt Van——"

"My dear Constance; there is not the slightest use in your arguing with me upon the subject. I will not for a moment imagine that my niece—my niece, I say—could have given any young man the encouragement you have given Mr. Stuart without——"

"I have never given Mr. Stuart the slightest encouragement."

"Without having considered all the consequences! A young woman of your age, Constance——"

"I'm only one-and-twenty, Aunt Van."

"A young woman of one-and-twenty is a responsible person," said Mrs. Van Ness severely, while the lizard blinked approvingly from his cushion in the sun. And then, and with an increasing coldness of

manner, she proceeded to ask her niece a few questions. Had Constance then absolutely no plans or intentions for the future? had she then no idea of the state of her father's affairs?

"What you are expecting or what you are waiting for I confess I am unable to understand. You are of age, and I might wash my hands of your affairs. I have not," said Mrs. Van Ness, pressing her perfumed handkerchief against her pale and glittering eyes, "I have not been accustomed to much confidence from you, Constance; but still, as your only near relative, as an old aunt who has always been kind to you, and proud of you, and——"

"Dear Aunt Van," said the girl, kneeling down quickly beside her and trying to take her hand.

"And when I think," went on the hand-

kerchief, "that I used to imagine that—that you—cared for me——"

"You know," said Constance earnestly, "that I am not ungrateful."

"Ah—gratitude!"

"If there is anything I can do to prove it——"

The handkerchief dropped.

"Then why won't you marry Mr. Stuart?" demanded its owner briskly, looking sharply at her niece.

The girl's face flushed. She made an effort to rise, but the jewelled fingers were laid upon her arm.

"Poor Jack!" she said bitterly. "I don't think he would thank you for this, Aunt Van. I don't care for him. If Fanny has told you everything, perhaps she has not forgotten to tell you that. I don't love him; I—— Good heavens!" she said suddenly, getting up to her feet, her

proud lips beginning to tremble a little as she spoke, "am I to marry a man simply because he is a good match—because he has money? Other girls—I——"

"Other girls fall in love, Constance. I presume that is what you mean, although I must say I had not expected to hear this sort of objection from a practical and sensible young woman like yourself," with a cutting little laugh. "However, so be it. We will consider it settled that you are waiting for some young man whom you can — love. Excuse me, my dear; that is precisely what you have been saying. And therefore, as you will not marry, may I ask what you intend to do? You are not bad-looking," said Mrs. Van Ness calmly, "and I have heard that people consider you clever. As my niece you will always have a certain *entrée* into society, although I cannot imagine the use this

privilege will be to you, living upon a secluded country farm in the society of a parcel of children and your step-mother. It is no affair of mine, my dear. You are old enough to decide these questions for yourself. No; excuse me, I am not angry. Mrs. Varley, *à perpétuité*, is perhaps hardly the companionship I should have chosen for you," said Mrs. Van Ness, shrugging her shoulders contemptuously; "but there is no accounting for tastes in this world. Be kind enough to ring the bell, Constance. My head aches," pressing two jewelled fingers languidly against her forehead; "I wish to order tea."

The girl put out her hand and complied with the request mechanically. There was something in the warm and over-perfumed atmosphere of the room, in the familiar tones of her aunt's voice, in the very look of her cold blue eyes which overpowered

Constance with a feeling of mental lassitude and discouragement. All the hope and dream of the last few days seemed degraded and outraged by this chilling flood of common sense. Mrs. Van Ness had the faculty of a prosaic nature—she made beautiful things seem impossible.

"I shall not say anything more about this matter," she went on now with deliberation. "You are quite mistaken in supposing I have ever urged you to marry money. It is the commonest thing in the world" (pensively). "Look at Fanny Thayer, look at half the people you know. Mr. Lawrence—Fanny tells me he spent the evening with you yesterday."

"Yes;" in a low voice, after a slight pause.

Mrs. Van Ness looked keenly at her niece.

"Mr. Lawrence is a case in point. I

knew his wife—a little thin creature, with a pretty face; a cousin of the Edward Poynter who married—— But what was I saying? ah, yes, about your friend Mr. Lawrence; *he* married his wife for money, notoriously. His own fortune had gone with the war—the Lawrences' fortunes are always going with something——"

"I think," said Constance, suddenly bending over and looking at the lizard, "I think that Mr. Lawrence was very fond of his wife."

"Has he told you so? Nonsense, my dear child. That is the difference between a man and a woman," said Mrs. Van Ness meditatively; "the longer a man is married the more apt he is to be fond of his wife, while a woman——"

She passed her handkerchief across her lips.

"Hand me those salts, Constance. My

dear husband used to say there were two important things in life — religion and money, and plenty of both. The one is, I trust, within the reach of all of us," in a hasty voice; "but the other—the other, Constance," laying her hand impressively upon the girl's arm, while the lizard, lifting up his white and skinny throat, seemed watching her with grotesque malice from his sunny corner, "the other——"

The door opened.

"Oh, Fanny may come in. Fanny knows all about it. We were speaking of Mr. Stuart, Fanny, my dear," said Mrs. Van Ness graciously, "and we should be glad to hear anything——"

"Oh, I never speak on the subject, thank you. Constance can do me the justice to say *I* have never tried to force her confidence," said Mrs. Thayer gloomily.

The new hat was less becoming—Tom had told her so—and she was deeply aggrieved.

"*I* am not capable of interfering with another person's comfort, or saying that so-and-so is not becoming when——"

"Do you happen to know if the tea is passable in this hotel?" said Mrs. Van Ness, looking at her steadily; "I have ordered some tea."

For the last few minutes Constance had been standing by the window. She leaned forward now, a smile breaking over her face. Her eyes brightened.

"You have nothing more to say, auntie? Tom is beckoning me," pausing an instant before shutting the door behind her.

Mrs. Van Ness and Fanny looked at each other without a word. The younger woman sprang up and hurried to the window.

"No, there is only Tom," she said in a puzzled voice, and as though answering a

question. "Oh, and Jack—I see poor Jack —and that Mr. Lawrence. Oh—Aunt Van!"

"Ah," said Mrs. Van.

"You don't think Mr. Lawrence——"

"I wish you would be kind enough to ring that bell again, my dear?"

Mrs. Thayer obeyed in mortified silence. But silence was not Fanny's strong point. "Constance is so peculiar," she began again; "do you know, Aunt Van, I should really advise you——"

Can you imagine General Von Moltke listening to the critical suggestions of a young militiaman?

"I think, my dear," said the little old lady very distinctly, "that this is a matter which requires tact. Perhaps you had better leave it entirely to me, Fanny; it requires tact."

It had been a pleasant morning—for the lizard.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

THEY were all standing in a group before the fountain, when Constance joined them. Lawrence noticed she was looking rather pale.

"Yes," said Davenant, lifting his hat automatically, "that is one of the strange things of experience, that it can be shared with dumb beings who evoke a thousand thoughts and fancies which endear them, just as there are certain people one may meet and live with and like, who yet remain outside of all the sentiments and

feelings that have been quickened by a common life with them. Are you fond of animals, Miss Varley?"

"Davenant means that we are going to see the last of our horses. Hassan sends them off to Jerusalem to-morrow," said Jack.

"Hassan tells me he cannot get us a passage, and he is afraid we may have to wait here another ten days. Very provoking, but not his fault. He is dreadfully cut up about it though, poor old fellow. I suppose he is afraid we will think he has not managed well," said the Major, in his good-natured fashion.

"The dragomen — my experience is doubtless limited — but the dragomen I have chanced to meet have by no means seemed to me to justify their reputation for extortion or double dealing. I find these Syrians a simple and a childlike race of men," said Mr. Gard hesitatingly.

He took off his hat and passed his hand with a weary indecision across his high and narrow forehead.

"Your head aches, Edwin. Let me——"

"No, my dear, no," impatiently. "My wife is perhaps unduly anxious since my accident—a very Martha troubled about many things, but women are creatures of extremes, I observe," with an apologetic smile to the Major.

And through all this sound of voices the water dripped, the fig-leaves rustled in the sunlight. Overhead, loose masses of cloud were drifting in slow procession across a blue and opaque sky.

"The summer is coming," said Constance, smiling as she met Lawrence's glance. She bent down and stroked Lione. "My dog has made friends with you already, I see," pulling the long silken ears slowly through her fingers.

"I like dogs, you know."

"I remember," passing her hand more caressingly over Lione's head.

"I think these creatures should be kept in the stable," said Mrs. Gard.

"Ah," said Davenant mildly, "you don't believe in the transmigration of souls then, I suppose?"

Mrs. Gard turned sharply and looked at him, her faded face flushing a dull red. "Perhaps this gentleman is not aware—I am a clergyman's wife, Miss Varley," with a nervous uncertain laugh.

"Oh, I am sure Miss Varley agrees with me," dreamily; "I really like this old Egyptian idea. It binds one so firmly to the whole mysterious sequence of life, and our attachments to animals grow to mean so much more than mere habit or association. Why, take a favourite dog—what is the impression he leaves upon

you in his absence? One remembers a look, perhaps, for there is something in the glance of an animal which is like the glance of children — a look from a world out of which we have grown and yet faintly remember."

"Oh, come now," said Stuart, in a soothing and conciliatory tone; "a horse is a horse and a dog is a dog, my good fellow."

"And an appointment is an appointment," said the Major, taking out his watch.

The trusty Hassan was waiting for them in the doorway. They went out slowly, Constance and Mr. Lawrence passing out together—together, but not talking to each other, as Stuart noticed with mingled irritation and relief. He remembered afterwards how through all the idle sauntering, the desultory chatter of that morning, there had been a singular persistence of

observation in Lawrence's attitude, a look which suggested a question piercing through all the careless quietude of his manner. Once, as they were standing for a moment side by side, "You are going away before long, I think you said," Stuart remarked abruptly.

The other man nodded.

"When?"

"I don't know. I never have plans."

"A precious queer way of travelling, that," said Jack impatiently.

The young fellow could hardly be civil. He was in a rage of jealousy and angry suspicion, and the worst of it was that nobody seemed to care or be aware of it but himself, and, perhaps, Mrs. Gard.

The eager-eyed little woman looked at him curiously once or twice as they crossed the square before the hotel, going over to see the horses.

It was a picturesque group they found there: a dozen horses, a little company of muleteers, fine hardy Syrians, in all their bravery of silken scarfs and sashes and yellow slippers, fresh from the bazaar.

"And so good-bye to all the old days," said Stuart, looking at them regretfully. He coloured a moment after, meeting Mrs. Gard's eye. The woman's notice embarrassed him. He turned to her husband.

The Major and Mr. Gard were discussing the politics of their country, standing with perturbed and absorbed faces, their elderly backs turned upon the world at large, deep in the question of the new Army Reductions Bill, "which, as a minister of the gospel, I cannot but approve," Mr. Gard was proclaiming sententiously.

The Major shook his gray old head.

"The country is going to the dogs, my dear sir."

"Let it. If it goes in the name of Christianity—that is all I ask—in the name of Christianity."

"You are getting over-excited, Edwin dear."

"I say let it go. It can't do better. And I appeal to you as an army man to answer me frankly, 'Have you, or have you not, gone forth to meet these unfortunate Indian brethren of ours with outstretched hand——'"

"*That* I have," said the Major, with a grin.

"With words of peace upon your lips——"

"Jack!"

Mr. Stuart turned his head.

"Shaitan is leaving, Jack. Won't you come and say good-bye to the poor old fellow?" asked Constance, in her clear girlish voice.

He crossed over quickly to where she was standing.

"You had forgotten the dear old horse," she said reproachfully; "the horse who brought me into Damascus," reaching up her hand to pat its glossy neck.

"That was only yesterday," answering the tone rather than the words.

"Only yesterday," she repeated softly, with a slow irrepressible smile, which hurt him as nothing else could have done.

He turned away sharply.

"You are ill," she said, with a sudden change of manner, catching a glimpse of his pale averted face.

"No."

The frank blue eyes watching him so kindly seemed to trouble him. He moved abruptly.

"You are not sorry that thing is over," he said brusquely, indicating with a nod

the train of horses and attendants before them.

Constance hesitated.

"It has been quite perfect in its way. There are things—— I shall never forget some of the days we spent together," the colour deepening a little on her cheek.

Jack looked up eagerly.

"Nor I. Do you remember——" He wanted to ask, "Do you remember that day at Nablous?" but something stopped him. "Do you remember Esdraelon?" he said.

"And the night we were lost? You were so very kind to me that evening."

"And our meeting Ferris. It was a close shave that time, by Jove!" with an eager laugh.

Whatever jealous doubts had tormented him that day were forgotten now in the familiar delight of her presence.

He drew a long breath, looking about him with a sudden sense of pleasure. "One feels cramped and restless in the city. I could not sleep last night."

"Last night? I was awake too," said Constance smiling.

"I meant to have asked you. I saw the light in your window. See here, Constance," a quick pleased look coming into his handsome face. "I have an idea. Can't we have another ride together, just you and I? Say we go to-morrow; I can get the horses——"

"Not to-morrow. Mr. Lawrence has asked me to ride with him to-morrow," she said.

Perhaps it was just as well that Davenant interfered. He joined them now, his hat pushed back a little from his forehead, a look of quiet pleasure upon his mild and abstracted face.

"I have been looking at those horses," he said, coming up to where Constance was standing; "they are wonderfully like women —delicate, swift, proud, affectionate."

"Affectionate!" repeated Stuart.

"Oh, don't bear malice, Jack. I'm sure Shaitan was more surprised than yourself on the only occasion you ever came to grief together," carelessly.

"A horse is like any other good thing in this life," said Davenant; "you must be alone with him to know him. I don't boast much of my own riding," with frank simplicity, "but I think, after watching an Arab going over these Syrian hills at full speed, one gains quite a new revelation of the beauty of the old Centaur fable — the doubled existence; the keen animal enjoyment; the appeal to all the higher life of the senses and dominion over nature in her hidden places; the

knowledge of the silent uplands under strange constellations and secret sea-washed places of the world."

"Well, I don't know," said Lawrence doubtfully, "we have been long enough trying to get free from animal conditions; I hardly covet going back to them myself, not even to meet my ancestors."

He turned to Constance. "I think there is some plan for going to the jewellers' bazaar. You will come? Mrs. Gard is going," putting out his hand and touching the fan that hung from a ribbon at her waist. He opened and shut it slowly. "Is that the Japanese fan for which Davenant wrote those verses? It's a good bit of colour, you know, with that gray dress," looking at her with a smile. And presently there was a general move towards the bazaar. It was a delightful May morning—a warm breezy day full of delicate sun-

shine and the flicker of young leaf-shadows on the ground, and the girl's happy glance wandered, full of a still content from blossoming earth to sky—that blue stainless sky of summer she had never yet looked on with him by her side before. For it had been in winter, and in the bleak New England spring that she had known Lawrence; listening to him, walking by his side through this warm and caressing air, seemed a new and exquisite refinement of delight.

"Where were you a year ago to-day?" she asked him once, after a long silence.

"A year ago?"

"Last May. I was at home"—a vivid picture of the old place rising up before her. There was a certain hill behind the house there, the highest point for miles around, overlooking a wide stretch of characterless landscape—a confused reach of

low meadow-land, and arid rock-strewn pasturage and endless straggling lines of weather-beaten fence. And there was a road winding up this hill; a sunken sheltered lane where the small brown tree-buds glistened first in the mild March afternoons, and the barberry bushes still kept a few scarlet clusters long after the first snow. Now, as she spoke, the vision of this place came back to her with the recollection of all the evenings she had waited there to see the sunset cast some brief interval of beauty about this joyless New England world. A hundred familiar memories came back to her—of short wintry afternoons, dying redly above a mute and snow-stricken country; of warm June nights, and long hours full of the ineffable melancholy of the spring, and with one thought, one longing, running through them all—and that a thought of Lawrence. For in those

years that were past now—past—Denis Lawrence had grown to mean to her all the desirable, the precious, the ideal part of life. It said something for this man's sincerity of nature that even now, after all these years of idealisation, and face to face with the disenchanting touch of reality, it seemed to this girl the one good thing in all her life to remember how she had loved him.

The silversmiths' bazaar was vast and cool and shadowy; a roofed enclosure divided into square raised compartments by countless narrow passage-ways; a place of dim light, and the glow of furnaces, and the sound of metal striking metal. They wandered on from one small platform to another. The outer sunshine streamed in through the small narrow openings, high up between the lines of rude stone columns supporting the vaulted roof—streamed in on the crouching, and swaying, and pros-

trate forms of the workmen, white-clad and blurred, seen through the curling smoke,—the light catching here and there on some pale heap of wrought silver, some mass of glittering coin, or quaint mysterious amulet, graven with strange characters and set about with dull and curious stones.

Constance was looking at a collection of these charms against the evil eye when her sleeve slipped back a little, and the keen glance of the native workman caught the yellow gleam of amber about her wrist. He leaned forward—a tall sinuous Arab, clad in dark-coloured robes, his head bound about with fine white linen. He leaned forward and looked and smiled.

"*Taïb?*"

He held out a small fretted band of gold to Constance.

"I don't understand," the girl said quickly.

"I think, as near as I can make it out, he wants to buy your beads," said Lawrence. "See, he is offering you that other bracelet in exchange. He says they are very good. Would you mind letting him look at them?" putting out his hand to take the string of amber.

He looked at it a moment before giving it back to her.

"You used to wear that when I first knew you," he said. "It suits you—that amber," slipping the smooth yellow balls through his fingers. "I remember breaking the clasp of this once."

"You had it mounted for me; I am superstitious about it," said Constance. "I have worn it such a long while now—as a charm."

Lawrence looked at it curiously.

"It is getting worn thin again. Let me take it; I can have it put in order for

you," fingering the beads with a certain childish pleasure.

He was still holding them in his hand when Stuart came up with some message.

"I have been looking for you everywhere, Constance."

"I have been sitting here."

"Well, Mrs. Gard wants you. They are going to buy perfumes, and Hassan is waiting, and—— You have lost your beads," his eye resting suddenly upon her bared white wrist.

"Mr. Lawrence has got them for me."

"Oh, Mr. Lawrence," repeated Jack slowly.

He was not a man to notice trifles. He was singularly free from whims and fancies. A man who prided himself, as a general rule, upon the cool and reliable quality of his common sense. And yet it required an effort now for him to keep his temper —an effort which made him clench his

hand and brought the blood mantling to his face.

"Well, come when you are ready," he said, with an elaborate assumption of indifference, and addressing himself pointedly to Miss Varley. As much as possible he avoided looking at her companion.

"I am afraid poor Jack must be ill to-day," the girl said, glancing after him anxiously.

They went out into the street again and through the small quiet square where the vendors of perfumes assemble — old men for the most part, and many of them Jews. They sat down on the carpet before a shop—a dingy array of shelves and dim glass bottles, and dry glittering piles of gums and heavy lumps of incense. A wrinkled old man, with a long white beard and a curious fur cap upon his head, came out to take their orders. He served them

reluctantly, with tremulous yellow hands that shook as he held the precious drugs up against the light, gloating with old covetous eyes over their thick and enervating odours.

When they left this place the air about them was heavy with escaping perfume, and for hours the faint scent clung to their hands and the folds of their hair and dress.

They went back into the main bazaar.

"I should like to have another look at that old mosque," said Mr. Gard.

They paused before it, watching the natives pass through the cloistered court or loiter about its delicate trickling fountain, or disappear into its cool and sombre depths.

"Dear me," said Mrs. Gard, with a sigh, "when one thinks that all this belonged to the Christians once! And now to see it in the hands of those

nasty Arabs: people without a religion or—or——"

"Or morality," suggested Mr. Gard.

"Or anything else," added his wife.

"Pardon me," said Davenant seriously; "but surely you forget their rugs?"

"Rugs!" repeated Mrs. Gard.

"Well, Persian carpets then, if you like the term better. When I think of what treasures there are in that building, what old and priceless fabrics from what remote and forgotten looms, and when I reflect that we are even debarred from entering in all humility to gaze upon this lost beauty, it justifies in my mind what I have always considered as one of the fatal mistakes of the middle age—I refer, of course, to the later crusades."

"Well, I never!" said Mrs. Gard blankly.

She looked round as though appealing

to Stuart for sympathy, but Stuart was nowhere to be seen.

Meantime Mr. Lawrence was speaking to Constance about his proposed journey to Bagdad, speaking of it rather as of a remote possibility—a plan of the past—"A plan I had undertaken half out of desire to find myself once more in the desert, because the fascination of vast horizons and great silence was still about me; and half perhaps—well, to get rid for awhile of my own personality. I have been growing restless here of late—dissatisfied. People don't understand," thrusting his stick into the ground impatiently.

"You are dissatisfied with your work, perhaps," said Constance doubtfully.

"My work!" he laughed. "It is kind of you to call it by any such name, Miss Varley. I'll tell you what I wish you

would do though. Come and see it. I've got rather a nice place here in old Ahmed's house. You remember the Armenian I pointed out to you yesterday?"

She nodded.

"Well, I'm staying in his house at present. A jolly old place. I wish you would come and see it. Come to-morrow with Mrs. Thayer."

"I will ask her," looking up at him eagerly.

They had come in sight of the hotel now. "I wonder if Jack went home?" Constance suggested. It troubled her, in the midst of her own exceeding content, to think of Stuart's disappointment. She had never felt so inclined to friendliness towards him as now, when anything but friendliness was impossible. All the generous impulse of her nature—the deep tenderness, born of a hopeless love, and

going out with quick compassion to all futile and hopeless longing — intensified and vitalised her sympathy, and gave her a feeling of comradeship with Stuart. As she said to herself simply, she was very sorry for Jack.

They came upon him quite unexpectedly now, standing beside the fountain, speaking to one of the men staying in the hotel. He looked up and nodded as they passed.

"You had better make up your mind to do it," his companion was saying. "You'll find it decidedly pleasanter going there with a party, and the other men——" and a moment after Constance heard him laugh.

She had stopped at the foot of the staircase to say good-bye to Lawrence.

"We shall see you this evening?" she asked.

"This evening?" he hesitated. "I have

half an engagement. Yes, I will come," looking suddenly into her face. "I must make interest with Mrs. Van Ness," smiling. "I must get leave to take you out riding to-morrow."

He lifted his hat and walked quickly away. As he passed out of the door Stuart turned and looked after him.

"I seem to know that man by sight," his companion observed carelessly. "Friend of yours, isn't he?"

"No," said Stuart.

He excused himself a moment later. "I must speak to that lady a minute," looking over to where Constance was standing with her hand on Lione's collar.

"All right," said the stranger, nodding good-naturedly. "You can always find me again if you make up your mind to join us. You had better come, I think."

Stuart waited until he had left the court-

yard. He walked over deliberately to Constance. "I should like to speak to you," he said.

"To speak to me?" the girl looked up wonderingly. "Why, certainly, Jack. Is there anything——"

"I should like to speak to you, alone. If you will kindly step into the parlour with me. The place is quite empty at this time of day. I shall only detain you a moment."

There was something in his tone, or perhaps in the unusual formality of his manner, which touched the girl's pride to the quick. She dropped Lione's head, stood up, and looked the young man steadily in the face.

"As you like; I am quite ready," she said.

CHAPTER V.

ANOTHER STEP.

As Stuart had said, the drawing-room was empty: a large vaulted room, built for coolness, with narrow darkened windows, and a brimming marble basin into which a thread of glittering water fell back without ripple or sound. As in all Damascene houses, the room was divided in two parts by a raised platform covered with Persian carpets; but here—a concession to European luxury—a table and some chairs had been added to the furniture, and a couple of large ostrich eggs swung slowly before the

doorway, suspended from the ceiling by a string.

A broad divan of leather made the circuit of the room against the wall. Constance crossed over and took her seat upon it in the farthest corner. Her dog had followed her in, and came and laid down at her feet. She turned her head a little and glanced from under her eyelids at Stuart. She drew a long breath and pressed her gloved hands tightly together. She waited for him to begin.

His first words startled her.

"Did you happen to notice that man I was speaking to out there a moment ago?" indicating the courtyard with a nod.

She looked up.

"I saw nothing especial about him."

"No," with a short laugh, "only I was not sure that you had noticed him. I'm

going away with him. I'm going to Baalbeck, to-morrow."

Constance said nothing.

"You don't ask me why I am going?"

"I suppose you want to see Baalbeck," she answered, looking straight before her. She would have given something just then to avoid further explanation.

"Oh, that's it, of course," the young man said defiantly.

He stood where he was for several minutes, his hands in his pockets, his eyes fixed upon the ground. Through the silence he could hear her light hurried breathing; a bee flew in at the open doorway, and dashed itself audibly against the window-pane.

"Constance!"

His whole manner had changed to one of utmost gentleness. He sat down on the divan beside her, and laid his hand very quietly upon hers.

"Do you think I am going away on your account?" he said.

She did not move her hand. She looked at him without speaking. Her face was quite pale.

"I think," said Stuart, after a moment's silence, "I think it would be well for us to understand each other better. I think——" He drew himself back abruptly. "You have believed that I was jealous to-day."

She moved uneasily at that.

"You ask me—questions——"

"I was jealous; you are right," said Stuart quietly.

He waited a moment, trying to collect the words.

"I said we ought to understand each other better," looking at her gravely "Until we came here I thought, I believed, there was a—a chance of your caring for me in time. I should not tell you this

now if it did not explain—— I'm not very good at explanations," with a faint smile, his face flushing red.

There was no answer.

"Until we came here," the young man went on more rapidly, "I had always that hope before me. I thought that in time—— I have never cared for anyone as I have cared for you. It seems to me now that I must have loved you from the first day I ever saw you. I don't go in much for being clever myself—not like those other fellows—but I know enough to see the difference. I could admire you. To be sure I couldn't tell it to you in German, like Lawrence."

She looked up quickly, but he did not give her time to speak.

"I suppose you think that all this doesn't make much difference; that I tried to get up a flirtation with you because

you were the only girl around; and the consequences serve me right. Fanny told me as much as that once on her own account. I didn't take the trouble to deny it to her, but I *should* like to have you know"—his voice grew suddenly husky; he passed his hand impatiently across his lips —"I should like to have you believe that I loved you as well as any man can love. That's what I wanted to say to you. I gave you everything," getting up and walking hastily to the door.

He stood there for a minute or two, staring out at the blinding sunshine.

Miss Varley had not moved. There was a brass plate lying on the table before her. When he began speaking her eyes had fastened upon this unconsciously. She sat mechanically tracing the arabesques graven upon it with her finger, with the dull persistence of a fever-dream; with a

sickening realisation of the cruelty of her silence deepening with every moment that passed.

He came back and stood before her.

"There's not much more to be said now between us. You've been very honest with me. I—I never blamed you. You will be glad to remember that, only—— Look here, Constance," he said, with sudden passion, and stooped and took both her unresisting hands in his, "don't think I want to worry you. Lots of fellows have had this kind of trouble; I suppose I can bear it as well as they. But there is one thing I want to ask you——"

"Yes, Jack."

"You do care for me a little, I know; or, stop! I don't mean that; but you like me? You won't mind saying that; you like me?"

"Yes," the tears gathering slowly in her eyes.

"Then"—he drew a long breath—"isn't there anything I can do, anything? I'm not a man to say what I don't mean; you know me well enough for that; but if there was anything about myself that I could do or change," watching her face intently, "I'd wait any length of time."

I think what hurt her the most in this speech was the sense of its utter uselessness. The simple loyalty of this girl's nature was too deeply ingrained, too much a part of all her daily self to leave room for hesitation, much less doubt. But her imagination was touched by the piteous hopelessness of his appeal. She lifted her eyes a moment and then looked steadily away, her face growing white and rigid and expressionless. She was accustomed to be very honest with herself. Deep down—below all the passion of pity, the natural womanly emotion of the hour—she

was aware that nothing stirred responsive to his voice—that she did not really suffer; that that inmost self which thrilled with infinite tenderness at Lawrence's most careless word was dumb here — dumb and apathetic. All the innate honesty of her nature held her wordless.

"If there is anything that I could change," he said.

She repeated the words to herself blindly, trying to realise their significance to him as a man might wrench a paralysed limb to prove to himself its vitality. It was of no use. Even the knowledge of his daily, hourly care for her, the unswerving preoccupation with her—with her who had not even an honest impulse of liking to give in return—even this could not make her feel.

She put up her gloved hand to her lips; there was a faint perfume cling-

ing to it still of which she was distinctly conscious. She tried to speak, and the horrible silence lengthened between them; and she knew, without looking, what expression of desperate hope was dawning in the eyes fastened upon her face.

"If you tell me to stay," he said, "nothing more than that—I can wait,' with a curious catching of his breath.

"Jack!"

"I can wait," getting up to his feet with sudden uncontrollable excitement. "I won't trouble you, don't fear. You are not bound to anything. But I think you'll understand some day. I'm not afraid to leave my life in your hands," with a nervous laugh.

She looked up without speaking, and something in her face checked him in his triumph abruptly.

He hesitated; his hands pressed hard

upon the table which stood between them. The room was very still; the fountain glittered silently in the sunshine; now and then a warmer gust of air came blowing in at the open door. The bee was still beating its life out hopelessly against the window; there were footsteps crossing the court-yard; Lione lifted up his head from between his paws and listened with ears erect. "Sometimes I think it would be a relief to you if I went away," said Stuart slowly. "A *relief?*"

If this were only the story of Constance Varley, I think it would have finished here. I believe that in that moment she resisted one of the greatest possible temptations to insincerity—the impulse to put an end, at any cost, to all this misery; for perhaps the most betraying form of insincerity consists in this conscious self-abandonment to temporary high-pitched impulse.

Her lips trembled and turned pale; he could see her eyes glistening in the half-darkness; she had never seemed so beautiful to him, so desirable as now.

"I think you had better go, dear Jack," she said.

The footsteps in the court drew nearer. Lione scrambled to his feet and shook himself and growled. It was Mr. Gard who entered; he came in with his hat in his hand, with a deep-drawn sigh of content. "For the sun is growing intolerably hot, I assure you. You young people have shown your discretion in selecting this shady place."

No one answered for a moment. He looked at them both, not curiously, but with a slow and mild surprise.

"I am not interrupting you, I hope?"

"I was only explaining my future plans to Miss Varley. I think of going away to-morrow, Mr. Gard. To Baalbeck."

"But not for a lengthened period, I presume?"

He looked at Constance before answering. "I do not know," he said.

Mr. Gard had seated himself on a chair beside the table.

"I find it difficult to use those lounges," with a grave smile at the divan. "I see you prefer them, Miss Varley. And what is this—a recent purchase, perhaps?" taking up one of the brass plates from the table.

"No," said Constance.

"I thought you might have been making purchases in the bazaar. They have certainly a peculiar interest of their own, these brazen vessels, being, one can imagine, fashioned much in the same way as the brazen censers of the rebellious children of Israel. Have you any idea of the probable antiquity of these?" turning the platter curiously between his long thin hands.

"I don't know anything about those things," said Jack.

"Ah, you are not an antiquarian, I see, like your friend Mr. Lawrence. A very interesting young man, I found him. We had some slight conversation together this morning; I thought him remarkably well informed."

"I believe that he and Davenant know all about old carpets and old cracked tea-cups and that sort of thing. I don't go in for that kind of information myself."

"I confess I am somewhat of the same frame of mind," said Mr. Gard slowly; "my opportunities for acquiring such tastes have been few," speaking with a certain regret. "In my time this diversity of pursuits was hardly expected from a young man. We were educated on a somewhat severer method; but it paid, sir, it paid. We worked in those days," his voice grow-

ing rapid and thin. "We tried without ceasing. There's a new set of men come in since then, Mr. Stuart. They say we lack scientific training and all that. Maybe it's true. I don't deny it. But it seems hard to hear when a man has worked on through poverty all his life, doing his duty by the light that was given him. I am not an old man, sir; there is work in me yet," holding up his hand with an unsteady laugh.

"Edwin!" Mrs. Gard had come in without their hearing her.

She went and stood beside her husband's chair, chafing his hand between her own roughened fingers. "Is your head getting bad again, dear? I thought I heard your voice," turning distrustfully and with a certain defiant anguish from Miss Varley to Stuart.

Mr. Gard looked at his wife doubtfully,

with an excited reddened face. "I—I was only speaking to Mr. Stuart, Mary," pressing his other hand wearily to his forehead.

"Yes, dear."

"The sun would give anyone a headache to-day," said Constance gently.

"Don't you think you had better come with me and lie down a little while, Edwin?"

He rose irresolutely. "I—I am very well where I am. Let me pick up my own hat, Mary. I desire you not to do those things for me," with a nervous twitching of his careworn irritable mouth.

"Very well, dear."

She looked back anxiously at the other two from the doorway; a grotesque little woman, ill-dressed and fussy and commonplace, but with something about her which brought the tears to the girl's eyes. "I believe—I believe that is as good a woman

as ever lived. I admire her, I respect her," she said with sudden passion.

"What, Mrs. Gard?" asked Stuart, doubtfully.

He had hardly noticed the scene which had taken place before him. The old man had got a little excited, there was nothing so wonderful in that. In a certain way I think he was even grateful for the interruption. It had steadied his nerves. He was an obstinate fellow in his own way, Stuart. When he had looked at a thing long enough it never seemed so impossible. And back once more on the ordinary level of life he felt surer of himself. He was determined to profit by every opportunity.

"I believe," he said now with more firmness, "that it is Lawrence and Lawrence alone who is standing between us. Stop a moment, Constance"—as

the girl made some sign of dissent—"hear me out. You can safely leave me this much hope, I think. It won't make much difference to you, and to me—it would be something to remember," with a sudden quiver in his voice. He took her gloved hands in his, and held them tightly for a moment. "If ever I know that he—that you are not together, I shall believe that there is still a chance for me, that's all." He dropped her hands and turned away, and then came back and stood before her silently.

"I think you will find that I don't forget, Constance."

He left her without another word.

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH MR. LAWRENCE READS MÉRIMÉE.

LAWRENCE had gone directly home. A group of models were waiting before the door of his studio; he had been at some pains to induce these men to pose to him, but now he sent them away with hardly a moment's hesitation; he wished to be alone. Like all naturally undemonstrative men gifted with quick and mobile sympathies, the continued presence of a crowd of people fatigued his nerves, and ended by throwing him into a state of lassitude and profound melancholy. Now, as he

opened the door, the cool silence of his room gave him a sensation of positive pleasure. He looked about him; everything was as he had left it the day before; the window was still open, the same locust was chirping from time to time among the fig-leaves—the only sound, except the rustling of some loose papers the wind had scattered on the floor.

He picked up one of these papers as he entered; it was a letter from his sister. "I must answer this," he thought, and tossed it over on the writing-table, and threw himself down on his divan.

The hot glare of the streets seemed still before him, in confused impressions of colour and movement and light. He pressed his hand before his eyes; there was another face, a soft and harmonious personality which seemed to belong more fitly to this moment of satisfaction and

repose. There was a sense of radiant self-reliance about Constance which was infinitely attractive to him. He thought of her now with a look of pleased recollection on his face. He had found in her that most fascinating of qualities — an idealised reflection of himself. "She is just about where *I* was two or three years ago," he thought. He was charmed by the way in which they understood each other; being with her was like breathing once more in the fresh moral atmosphere of his own youth; when he listened to her he found again the expression of his own old dreams and desires, untouched, as yet—very eager, and unwearied of life. What had attracted him was shown to him again, but clad with a new expression, and instinct to him with a new sense of beauty and fleetness and loss; but he no more imagined that he had a part in

bringing this about than he held himself responsible for her love of animals or her taste in dress.

There had been two or three trifling incidents in their morning's experience together which came back now with irritating accuracy. That anxiety about Stuart, for instance. How was it reconcilable with—with——

"Why I might as well be Davenant, and be done with it," he said aloud with sudden impatience. He got up hastily, crossed the room, and sat down before his writing-desk, with the gesture of a man who has come to some decision. He glanced over his sister's letter, took a piece of paper, and began to write:

"Damascus: May, 187——

"My dear Kate,

"I start for Bagdad to-morrow. I have not the slightest idea how long——"

He threw the pen down with some muttered impatient exclamation of disgust. Going to Bagdad? The plan was an absurdity. Why there were lots of things to do in Damascus. These people, whose presence had disturbed him, would be gone in a week at the farthest, and there would be nothing more to interrupt his work.

"They would be gone," with a feeling of the same sudden and inexplicable irritation.

He took up his pen again and fell to drawing designs on the paper cover of the nearest book. It happened to be a volume of Mérimée's "Letters."

Lawrence had long ago passed that stage of literary development which exalts into genius the jaded and careful *ennui* of this elaborate, this misanthropic Parisian; but the book had the charm of old association for him. He opened it now at random;

he opened it at a passage in which Mérimée alludes to his first visit to Italy :

"When I left Paris I felt myself on the verge of a great passion," he says ; "but I reflected upon all it would cost her, and it seemed to me that such love as I had to offer could never requite her sacrifice. I left Paris, and she has never known the truth. *Elle n'en sut jamais rien.*"

The words made an impression upon him. There was something in the idea which appealed to all the refining, and perhaps a little fantastic chivalry of his nature. "*Elle n'en sut jamais rien.*" There was a delicacy of sentiment, a subtle generosity about the feeling which touched his imagination with a foreshadowing of silent and tender regret. After all, it was only a different version of his resolve of the night before. It was Constance who should

decide the situation; but would she? It was with an inexplicable restlessness and impatience he waited for that answer to come.

He was still sitting before his desk, looking vacantly out at the narrow strip of sky above the barrier of broad fig-leaves, spreading green and fan-like in the windless afternoon, when someone knocked at the studio-door.

"Come in!"

It was Ahmed the Armenian who entered. He came forward slowly, with measured steps.

"The long-expected are here, oh howadji."

"The deuce they are!" said Lawrence. He got up hastily. "When do you start?"

Ahmed stroked his beard gravely. It might be to-morrow night. Allah was

great; it might not be till after to-morrow. If the howadji still intended going—with a penetrating look from his keen old eyes—it was necessary to be ready at any moment.

"The desert is wide, howadji."

"The feet of thy camels are swift, oh Ahmed," the young man answered absently.

He looked down at the open book before him: "*Elle n'en sut jamais rien.*"

"I am going to the hotel again to-night," he added slowly. "I am going to see some friends there. When I return you shall have my answer. You shall have my answer before I sleep, oh Ahmed."

"Mashallah! So be it, in the name of God," the old man said.

He left the room with the same leisurely dignity of gesture, and Lawrence was once more alone.

The afternoon light was failing rapidly;

there was a grayish tinge now creeping over the fig-trees; the sky, seen through them, had grown cooler in tint, and the life of the city had awakened; he could catch a murmur of voices, the sound of far-off laughter, and the dull thrumming of a native drum, marking the cadence of a song.

The noise came from that café by the river to which he had taken Constance. He would go there now, he thought; and took up his hat and threw it down irresolutely. Some bits of old leather and stuff were hanging on the walls; he unfastened two or three of these and folded them together, and tossed them back in a heap upon the floor. It was useless beginning his preparations for departure yet.

But Davenant coming in at that moment was struck at once by signs of displacement and change.

"Hollo," he said, staring round him, "why what have you been doing? You're not going away, Lawrence?" He sat down on the divan and pushed his hat off his forehead. "How long is it since you have been at the hotel?"

"Not since morning," carelessly. "Have a cigar, Claude?"

"Ah, then you can know nothing about it. Thanks, no; I won't smoke."

"Know nothing about what? Has—has anything happened at the hotel?"

"Well, I've been making rather a fool of myself, I think," said Davenant mildly. He looked around the room again, and then up at the ceiling. "I say, Lawrence, have you got any money to spare?"

Denis nodded.

"Plenty. How much do you want?" getting up and going over to his trunk.

"I'm really very much obliged to you, old fellow——"

"Oh, that's all right. You startled me, though," taking up a cigar and lighting it. "I thought something might have happened to—to the hotel."

"I can return it to you next month," said Davenant earnestly. "I meant to have sailed for home directly if you could not let me have it; third class."

Lawrence went on smoking in silence a few minutes.

"I won't preach; but don't get into worse scrapes than you can get out of," he began doubtfully.

"Oh," said Davenant, "you couldn't have helped doing the same thing yourself. I never saw one like it—five hundred years old at the least, and in almost perfect preservation——"

"*What?*" said Lawrence, laying down his cigar.

"Five hundred at least. You never saw anything more exquisite. I happened to be just in time to save it. Mrs. Van Ness—you've seen her, Miss Varley's aunt?"

"Well?"

"She was going to buy it, and have the work transferred to some new piece of stuff—absolutely new modern stuff—fancy that!"

Lawrence laughed.

"If you would not mind telling me what it was to begin with, Davenant——"

"Well," said Davenant reflectively, "I should call it an inspiration—a poem in colour. I can't describe it; but imagine a piece of frail blue-gray silk, thin and silvery, and worn and very old, and all inwrought with strange beasts and growing plants; great blossoms in flat bright tints, intermingled with fantastic animal forms—a splendid and indeterminate life.

And scattered all through it, binding the work together, a rain of sweet and curious flowers—flowers delicate and precise in form, and of faint colour. And Mrs. Van Ness was going to transfer it! Upon my word," said the young man earnestly, "she made me feel quite ill."

Lawrence laughed again.

"You haven't seen Ferris lately?"

"He was round at the consul's this morning, getting letters. I asked him to come to the hotel, but he said he wouldn't. Ferris doesn't care much for women, I think."

"Ferris," said Lawrence slowly, "is one of the best fellows alive. I had some letters this morning too," looking over at his table. "One from my sister. They are both married now, my sisters. I wish someone would found a society for the selection of brothers-in-law."

"I don't object to mine particularly," said Davenant; "to be sure I don't see much of him. Their house is pure Elizabethan, and they have furnished it with Louis Quinze chairs — those gilt things, with legs, don't you know. I'm sorry, for I was very fond of my sister."

"But when it's a question between furniture and family affection——" said Lawrence, with quiet amusement.

"Oh, of course. Still I do go down there every autumn for a few days, to shoot. Last year I shot the dog," he added mildly.

They stayed there talking until the room had grown quite dark, and then went out to dine together. Lawrence looked back as he was closing the door.

"Forgotten anything?" asked his companion, pausing on the stairway.

"Nothing." The heavy door swung to behind them with a crash.

"I shall know all about it," thought Denis, "before I open that door again."

He ran lightly down the steps and linked his arm in Davenant's. "Come on and find Ferris. Who knows when we three shall dine together again," he said gaily. But even Ferris noticed that he was not like himself that night.

The hotel parlour seemed already full of people and lights when they entered it. There was quite a crowd about Mrs. Van Ness; the floor in front of her was strewn with old rugs and stuffs and porcelains and arms, and an almond-eyed Syrian and a wrinkled old Jew were kneeling on the platform placidly unfolding yet more of the precious things of the East.

"Ah, Mr. Lawrence"—she looked up graciously, holding up a fat and jewelled hand—"you are the very person I wanted to see—your fine artistic taste, you

know. And isn't this too enchanting, quite romantic—all these beautiful embroideries and things?"

"Have you been getting many of them?" said Lawrence.

The old Jew had looked up with grave alarm at the young man's appearance, and had begun hurriedly rolling some silken stuff together.

"I know that old fellow—the greatest old cheat in Damascus," Denis commented carelessly.

"Oh," said Mrs. Van Ness, "but my dragoman, Mahmoud, sent for him for me as a special favour; he always sends his assistant to sell his things unless to persons of very great consequence. Such a romantic idea! I really think you must be mistaken, Mr. Lawrence, for Mahmoud is perfectly devoted to me. He never would allow anything of that kind, I assure you."

"I see," said Lawrence shortly.

Miss Varley had looked up and bowed gravely as he came in. She was sitting a little away from the others, and nearer the window, working. Half the length of the room was between them, and he was conscious of her slightest movement. He was still standing by Mrs. Van Ness, looking down at a piece of linen she was showing him; but he knew when Stuart went over to speak to the girl.

"Oh, Persian, I should say; Persian decidedly," he said aloud.

He could have given no name to this vague and potent feeling which was gradually taking possession of all his being; he did not wish to name it. Only he was conscious of some subtle and uneasy delight which seemed to creep between him and the outer world. It is, perhaps, with some such unresisting pleasure that the trees in

the orchards feel the rose-white promise of their blossoms burst from the barren branches at the warm compelling touch of spring.

He had, in reality, been but a very few minutes in the room before he went over to where Constance was sitting. He stood leaning against the wall, his hand on the back of a chair, looking down at her moving fingers. It was a work belonging to Mrs. Van Ness over which the girl was busy, but he could not know this, and something in her constrained attitude and bent head annoyed him. He was a man full of fancies. There seemed to him something ominous in her silence to-night.

The swift white fingers trembled a little as he watched them. She looked up.

"You have seen Mr. Stuart?"

"Not to speak to."

"I think he was looking for you," said

Constance. She bent her face over her work. "Jack is going away to-morrow," turning to him naturally, with a sudden passionate craving for understanding and sympathy.

He did not answer. She glanced at him again a moment later, thinking he had not heard. He was looking out at the moonlight in the courtyard with the expression of a man whose thoughts were miles away. Her eyes fell again with a feeling of baffled expectation. She had thought all day of this moment, and now it seemed that he did not care to speak or listen. She kept her eyes fixed upon the sewing. "You are industrious to-night," said Fanny, passing. Constance had lost all that fine colour; she was looking quite pale and insignificant, Mrs. Thayer thought.

"Mr. Lawrence!"

Mrs. Van Ness had crossed the room

slowly, with a rustle of silk and a dropping of shawls and a scattering of faint perfume on the air. "I want to speak to you; and you have not seen my lizard," she said. The young man followed her reluctantly to a sofa beside the door.

"Sit down;" she pushed away some pillows, and made a place for him by her side. "I really have a great many things to talk to you about. My lizard is upstairs. He has bitten Mr. Gard twice already," with languid amusement; "but some people are so clumsy, you know. He is the most affectionate little creature in reality——"

"Mr. Gard is?"

Mrs. Van Ness laughed. "Poor Mr. Gard. He is our old clergyman, you know. At least my dear husband used to go and hear him; I never went to that church. And *entre nous*, you know," tapping

Lawrence's arm confidentially, "the poor old man is really quite——" she shrugged her shoulders significantly. "He has been *passé de mode* for years; an excellent man, but such a very dull preacher, and so shockingly poor! He had sunstroke last year, and his wife says that is the reason he resigned his parish; but the fact is," looking cautiously about her, and lowering her voice mysteriously, "they would have got rid of him any way—I know it. They had found a younger man to take his place, and really a young clergyman is so much more popular, you know. My dear husband always said it would make a difference of fifty per cent. in the pew rents when Mr. Gard was gone."

"Pleasant for him, poor devil!" said Lawrence compassionately.

"Oh, you are a Roman Catholic, Mr. Lawrence; you don't understand these

things. His old congregation behaved quite handsomely, you know; they gave him a silver teapot with an inscription. To be sure he could not live on that," with a deprecating smile. "He had got some employment as a book-agent, when I brought him and his wife abroad. I'm very fond of helping people; I like gratitude," folding her luxurious drapery about herself complacently.

"Gratitude?" repeated Lawrence absently, "that presupposes a most generous nature. My mother used to be fond of poor people——"

"I knew your mother; a beautiful girl she was, and very shy. I met her once at a reception at Judge Poynter's—the Member of Congress, I mean."

"I know," said Lawrence.

"Ah, of course," with a recollecting smile, "of course. He's a connection of

yours, I remember, by marriage. Well, what was I saying? ah yes. Your mother. I wanted to bring her out a little; I tried to give her a dinner; but there was something the matter with you—you had some ridiculous cold or other—and she would not come. Your father came without her. You are not like your father," turning to look at the young man with a critical glance.

"I remember your wife too," she said a moment after, "a little—— Hm!" calling herself to order abruptly. "I remember everybody, you see, Mr. Lawrence."

But Lawrence was silent. There was something which troubled him in this sudden evoking of dead faces out of the past at this moment, and when he most desired to hold his life, plastic and unshackled, in his grasp.

"You must come and dine with me when

we all get back to New York again. You are going back soon, I suppose?"

"I?" said Denis, looking up with a start; "how can I tell?"

"I'll give you a dinner if you will let me know when you arrive," said Mrs. Van Ness blandly. "A little dinner. I have never had more than eight people at once at my table since my dear husband died. Eight has been my limit," laying her hand impressively upon the young man's arm. "Eight, ever since."

Mrs. Thayer had been watching this long conference with some uneasiness. She passed them now; looked out at the clear moonlit sky for a minute. "Jack will have a lovely day for starting to-morrow," she said.

"Is Mr. Stuart going?" asked Davenant. He began to speak of his own departure. "I feel like a man who has been on a

spree," he said; "this sumptuous life of the East, this splendid use of colour and material, has given me an excess of sensation. These rugs and scarves, and all this wrought metal and worked linen and incense, amongst which these placid Orientals bask—as unconscious of its significance as the insect of the colour of its glittering wings — excite me still; but they no longer satisfy me; and I turn back instinctively to that Europe over which arose those two stars of the material and the spiritual life—the Venus of the Greeks and the Virgin of the Italians."

"Dear me. *Do* you suppose he means the Virgin Mary?" asked Mrs. Gard in a horrified whisper to Constance.

"Yes," said Davenant, turning to her in all simplicity, "that is what I mean. The worship of Venus is homage to the supreme beauty in woman; the worship

of the Virgin is homage to her most sacred form of suffering—the two ideas which form and resume all the world of art and literature, and without which our life would be that of the Oriental—a sumptuous and wordless and sterile thing."

"Oh," said the old Major, with his dry smile, "you forget:

> A Persian's heaven is easily made,
> 'Tis but black eyes and lemonade.

A rare old song we used to think that in the days when I was young. You boys don't read Tom Moore."

"I should hope not, indeed," said Fanny, with a toss of her head. She had no particular opinion about Moore, but any allusion to the Major's youth inspired her with a vague feeling of resentment.

Where Fanny was, the conversation was

apt to grow personal. In a few minutes they were all discussing the details of a recent social scandal, with whose principal actors they were all more or less acquainted. "And I must say I should like to know what made her do it," Fanny concluded candidly; "and unfortunately that is the one point one can never hope to understand."

"I think I can understand it," said Constance quietly. She hesitated and looked out at the splashing fountain in the moonlight. "There are some appeals a man has no right to make," she said with sudden passion.

Mr. Lawrence looked up quickly. "You would have had him keep silence then?"

"If I had been in his place," said Constance proudly, "I would have kept silent though I had died."

They went out into the courtyard together. It was a pale blue-gray night. There was

not a breath of wind stirring; the very shadows thrown by the young moon were motionless and half transparent; and the moon itself was reflected, a thin and yellow disc, in the smooth surface of the brimming pool.

Lawrence lingered a little behind the others. "I want to speak to you a moment," he said, and stood there irresolute, dipping his fingers in the tepid water, and breaking the placid reflection into wide gleaming circles of light. A mad impulse to tell her everything was on him, and still his lips were sealed by what he believed to have been her instinctive protest against listening to his speech. "I want to ask you——" he began again and hesitated.

"Yes?"

The branches stirring a little overhead, the moonlight shone down full upon the pure and sensitive face—a child's face it

seemed to him, and troubled with a child's dim apprehension of pain.

One moment he stood irresolute. Then he looked up quietly. "I have told your aunt I was coming for you to-morrow. You will like the horse I have got for you, Miss Varley—a very spirited creature; but he has been ridden by a lady before." His tone was the same that he would have used to a mere acquaintance. And yet, as he turned by the doorway to bid her good-night, there was something in his manner which made her put out her hand involuntarily, and speak.

"There is something the matter, Mr. Lawrence. I—I have been wanting to ask you all the evening." She pressed her hands together nervously. "You are in trouble, or something has happened since I saw you this morning. You have been doing something——"

"I," said Lawrence, looking at her steadily, "I have been reading Mérimée." He took her hand in his, and held it for a moment. "Good-bye," he said slowly.

"Good-bye."

He looked up smiling. "You mean it is only good-night?"

CHAPTER VII.

ANOTHER LIFE.

CONSTANCE was in her own room the next morning when Mrs. Gard knocked at the door.

"Come in!" The girl started up, surprised at the unexpected face of her visitor. "I thought it might be Fanny," she said half apologetically; and then, with instinctive hospitality, hastened to make the new-comer comfortable, pushing the one easy-chair nearer the window, which stood wide open this mild spring morning. There were some books and a half-finished letter lying upon the table, but she had been

sitting before them with folded hands, she did not herself know how long.

"I hope that Mr. Gard is better this morning — has got over his headache?" she said presently, seeing that her guest showed no disposition to speak.

Mrs. Gard looked up quickly. "I wanted to tell you about that. He—my husband—he is not well; the least thing excites him, and for strangers, who do not know——"

"But I do know," said Constance, with a ready wish to spare her the pain of telling; "my aunt has told me."

The little woman opposite looked up with eager eyes. "She has told you?" leaning forward a little and catching at her breath.

Miss Varley glanced about her uneasily. "I heard that Mr. Gard had had sunstroke," she said gently. "I was very sorry to hear it."

"Yes!"

"And that—that he had given up his parish. It must have been a great sorrow to you," looking up with grave compassion.

She moved her hand impatiently, as though putting herself out of the question. "And she told you nothing else about him, then? Nothing about the reason of his leaving?"

Miss Varley looked at her bewildered.

"She said he had sunstroke and never told you how or why, and you never thought to ask her, or she answered you as she did that Mr. Lawrence last night. They thought I did not hear them talking of Edwin. A dull old man, they called him, and shockingly poor; and the parish—the parish would have got rid of him anyway. Our own parish, Miss Varley," clasping her thin rough hands together, and looking down at them with a certain bewildered

incredulity. "And she said she knew it; that they had come to her—for advice."

"I am sure," said Constance, hesitating, "I am sure that my aunt meant nothing unkind. And I know that Mr. Lawrence—— If you will tell me what you would like him to know, I promise you that he shall hear it to-day," lifting up her blue eyes frankly.

Mrs. Gard did not seem to notice the offer.

"Our own parish," she repeated vacantly. "Why, Miss Varley, we went there when we were first married, Edwin and I; and we made it our home. It was a poor enough place until Edwin came, just a small country church; and he started everything —the evening service for the mill-hands, and the Sunday-school, and the Wednesday prayer-meetings; he never missed one of them in twenty years, summer or winter, until last year. There wasn't another

minister in all the country round who could say as much," with a sharp nod, "not one. And to call him a dull preacher! Why, we have had people visiting us—people from Boston, who had heard everything—and they said they had never listened to better sermons than my Edwin's," a dull look of pleasure creeping over her strained and anxious face.

Perhaps it was some relief to her to say these things to Constance. People had a way of coming to the girl with stories which demanded sympathy; she never failed to meet them; whatever trouble she might have of her own thrust out of sight and speechless; and in all things she had found it easier to give than ask. She listened now in silence.

"It was a poor little place of ours—our parish—but there were green fields all about the village, and country air and quiet; that

was what made Edwin think of it," putting up her hand nervously to her coarse colourless lips. "It was a terrible summer in New York, and we heard how the people were dying every day in the city, and he thought it was his duty to give some other man—some younger man—a chance. He told me of it one night after the evening service—we were walking home together;" sitting up abruptly, "and the next week he had gone there and made the exchange, and before the month was over—— It is the man whose place he took who has got our parish now—Edwin's parish," repeating the words with dogged protest.

"Do you mean to say he took it?" the girl asked indignantly.

Mrs. Gard looked up.

"People must live, you know. And when Edwin was not strong enough—— Edwin will not have me speak of it. He says it

was the will of Providence; but I say—I say it was our home," with a sudden break in the thin harsh voice. She got up presently. "I didn't mean to have troubled you so long, Miss Varley." She turned towards the door and looked back. "I am a clergyman's wife," she said hurriedly. "I have a right to speak. I have been listening to you all since I have been here. I have sat by and heard you speak. I have heard those young men talk of their carpets and their pictures, and laugh at this, and sneer at that, and talk of the proper understanding of life—— Life! there is not one of you who knows what the word means. You call yourselves artists; I say you are nothing but lookers-on—people who stand by and weigh and criticise, while others—— And while you are talking about life my Edwin has gone out and acted; he has laid down his life for another, while you——

And you have everything in this world," the dull colour rushing suddenly to her faded cheek.

"I think you should be very proud of your husband," said Constance simply.

Mrs. Gard stood still a moment, fumbling nervously with the key in the lock.

"I beg your pardon," she said presently, taking out her coarse cotton handkerchief and passing it quickly over her face. "I'm sure I didn't mean to be uncivil, Miss Varley, and after all your aunt's kindness to my husband——"

She hesitated, and put her hand in her pocket and looked up wistfully.

"I thought I'd like to show you——" with a hesitating glance at the girl's face. "It's a photograph we had taken of Edwin's testimonial—the silver teapot and tray they gave him in the parish. It isn't a very good photograph, but if you look at it by the

light—— I copied the inscription on the back there," with a foolish embarrassed laugh.

Miss Varley took the poor little bit of cheap cardboard in her hand and looked at it for a moment steadily, and then she turned and looked at her companion. The sharp commonplace face had grown almost beautiful by the mere force of sincerity and tenderness. She stooped with a sudden impulse and kissed Mrs. Gard upon the cheek.

"When the time comes—— I think some of us may be ready to give up our lives too," she said.

The undemonstrative New England woman looked down, embarrassed by the unusual caress.

"I—I did not mean to be uncivil," she repeated vaguely, and slipped out of the room a moment later with a mute and doubtful glance.

It was a very mild spring day.

When she was once more alone, Constance turned instinctively to the window, resting her arms upon its cushioned ledge, and looking out absently at the soft and luminous gray of the sky.

It was one of those silent colourless days when every sound seems to come from far off, and every note of colour is intensified to twice it normal value. A day full of light warm gusts of wind and quick drops of rain which wet nothing, the sun shining the while behind the clouds with a silvery and muffled glare.

She leaned upon the window-sill and looked out absently.

Once Major Thayer passed under her window; he was coming back from the bazaar with Mr. Gard, and looked up cheerfully and called her name. She watched them pass in at the open door-

way, the clergyman following last with stiff alacrity, a smile upon his thin ascetic face. He held his hat in his hand as he came in, and the light shone down full upon his high bald forehead, and its meek fringe of smooth gray hair.

And this man had known supreme self-sacrifice to an ideal?

She looked after him meditatively, pausing there on the threshold, as it were, of her own experience, with the soft enervating wind blowing about her, in a world made fair and sweet with the rapturous awakening of the spring, lingering a moment to look back at this other life, with a vague and anxious inquiry. He had answered the question in his own way; but how when it came to her?

The day deepened into noon. She began to move about her room restlessly, fingering her riding-whip, straightening the feather

in her hat, dwelling in a hundred different ways upon the details of her preparation. For this ride had grown to assume a curious importance in her eyes. She looked forward to it with a curious unworded presentiment; the colour flushing softly to her cheeks as she thought how, out there in the silent fields, there might come some look, some word—— And even to herself she did not end the sentence, standing suddenly still, on her face a smile of grave and incredulous delight.

It was after twelve o'clock when Fanny came up for her.

Stuart was going to Baalbeck. His friends had started; his horse was waiting at the door.

"He is only delaying to say good-bye to you," Mrs. Thayer told the girl reproachfully.

It was not an impassioned parting. They

shook hands by the foot of the stair-way.

"Well, take care of yourself, Constance," said Jack, in his matter-of-fact voice.

On the whole, I think the young man was inclined to feel a little ashamed of his previous emotion.

He turned back once more as he was going out of the door.

"I mean what—what I told you yesterday. I'll come back then," with an emphatic nod and a new look of firmness about his mouth. And then he took her hand in his again and held it.

"You'll come back?" said the Major, catching at his last words; "oh you'll come back soon enough, never fear. I think I'd back our attractions against Baalbeck."

And so, with a good-natured laugh on the old man's side, they parted.

"It will do the boy good. I don't half

like the way he is looking," the Major said to himself softly, gazing after the horseman clattering down the street. And then he turned and contemplated Miss Constance's pale face with a smile of considerable humour, as much as to say, "Good heavens! what tragic young fools these are." But I don't think that Constance paid much attention to his meaning.

She looked up now, drawing a deep long breath, with the action of a person putting some puzzling question out of mind. She slipped her hand under the Major's arm and paced slowly up and down the courtyard at his side.

"I wish I knew someone who could tell me what I wish to know," she said half aloud.

The Major looked at her with undisguised alarm.

"My dear, ask Fanny," he began; "Fanny is the proper person——"

And then Constance laughed.

"I was thinking of the significance of life," she said, with a touch of her old imperiousness. "It seems to make so little difference what one tries to do——"

"A man must be very young to think it makes *any* difference," said the Major philosophically. "You young people fancy that your little plans and hesitations and decisions are shaping life, and all the while—— But mind, I am not giving you any advice, you know."

"No," said Constance, smiling; "you send people to Fanny for that."

"Exactly," the Major assented with perfect composure; "and when you have been married as long as I have—— But now about this ride — I suppose you've heard that I'm ordered out for escort-duty?"

"Oh yes; you're coming, of course," said Constance, looking down.

The Major smiled to himself confidentially.

"Don't mention it at head-quarters," he said aloud, "but I'm beginning to find it rather a bore to have to regulate my movements by Mrs. Van Ness." Adding hastily a moment later: "To be sure it always pays better to give in to a woman than to have a row with her; she's sure to carry her point either way."

And then he turned and looked at Constance again with an air of amused relief. It was perfectly evident the girl had not been listening to a word of what he said.

She went back to her own room presently. The absolute quiet of intense expectation had taken possession of her. As the hours passed this self-control only deepened. Fanny, moving restlessly in and out of the room, found her always in the same atti-

tude—sitting quietly by the window looking out at the sky.

"And what you can find in that dull gray day to stare at is more than I can see," the little woman told her at last with secret impatience.

"If you watched it long enough you would see that all those clouds are moving," the girl answered, looking up with a sudden smile in her blue eyes. There was something in the silence, the still and ceaseless unrest of this colourless day, which suited her fancy. She could feel the minutes passing one by one, and the sensation gave her a certain pleasure. She had no wish to hurry the flight of time; on the contrary, this pause of suspense seemed to her inexpressibly grateful. She kept her thoughts turned resolutely away from what might be coming, only from time to time she felt her heart beating quicker, and once

she put her hand up to her eyes with a sudden smile to find them full of tears.

But all the day was not full of this same silence. Down by old Ahmed's house, near the shoemakers' bazaar, the narrow street was crowded with loitering groups of men. Now and then these groups were scattered by the passing of the bare-legged porters bending double under the weight of their heavy bales; newcomers were constantly arriving, and at every moment the door opened to give passage to some anxious-faced merchant or swarthy Bedawy, with scant discoloured drapery and imperturbable gait. At one moment a large white donkey came trotting down the street, shaking his crimson trappings and bells, and everyone made way respectfully for its master, Ahmed himself coming to the door to receive the small wrinkled old man in the brown-and-white striped *abbas* and the yellow hand-

kerchief bound about his temples with cords of camels' hair.

As the gate was thrown open before him, the men waiting about outside could catch a brief glimpse of a crowded courtyard, a curious medley of bales and boxes and rope-bound saddles and lines of waiting dromedaries, huge threadbare-looking beasts, moving their long thin necks restlessly from side to side, or crouching in uncouth rest along the narrow strip of shadow by the wall. The place was full of men and noise and colour—the guttural moaning of camels and voluble Arabic voices, and white-clad figures and fluttering robes of blue.

"By Jove! a fellow can't help but envy you," said Ferris, looking out at the shifting crowd.

Mr. Lawrence, to whom the words were addressed, was taking a last look at his old studio. Here, too, was every sign of move-

ment and change; bare walls and corded boxes, and a confused litter of papers and half-finished sketches and empty colour-tubes strewing the tables and floor.

He looked up now. "I have left you that portfolio of drawings. And, by-the-way, Ferris, there's a lot of blue tiles at Aboo Antika's—I've got the old beggar's receipt for them somewhere; I told him to send them around to you. I should like to have you keep them. They will do to build a mausoleum to my memory," with a laugh. "You know you never expect to see me back."

And then again, after a moment's silence: "You'll be glad to hear old Ahmed has come to terms at last."

"About that girl?"

Lawrence nodded. "It's all settled; I'm going to paint her. It suddenly occurred to our friend Ahmed that, being an infidel

Jewess already, it could hardly hurt little Ayassa much to win her dowry from the exceeding folly of a dog of a Christian. It is a view of the case I take care not to discourage. I shall make something out of that I think, old fellow," looking up with a confident smile. "I believe old Ahmed hardly expected me to go," he added presently, "and indeed until last night——"

The fascination of desert travel seemed to have taken possession of Lawrence already. He went out a dozen times in the course of the morning to watch the preparations of the caravan. This silent and sober prevision of great distances, and a barren and lifeless land, affected his imagination. The Bedawy sheikh halted a moment under his window, and the sight of his keen and fleshless face, the thin black beard and piercing eyes looking out from under the shadow of his gaudy headdress, gave him a

curious thrill of excitement. He sat down and began telling Ferris of his former experiences—of desert stretches seen at dawn, of long silent journeys through the cooler hours before the morning, and evening encampments, and changeless skies high arched above illimitable space. And through all his rambling talk, through all the enforced quiet of his manner, Ferris detected, or thought that he detected, the presence of some unwonted emotion held out of sight. This very restlessness was something new in Lawrence.

On entering the studio his friend had found him busied in nailing up some of the various boxes which filled the room, and although he rose at once, throwing away his hammer with some muttered allusion to the cursed stupidity of these Arab fellows, it had struck Ferris even then that there was something beside the mere desire of travel

which was urging him on to push his preparations beyond the possibility of recall.

"You might have left all this until to-morrow," he suggested once, looking around at the dismantled studio; "you will find it deuced uncomfortable work waiting all the afternoon with nothing especial to do."

"I've got an engagement," said Lawrence; "I am going out riding. I promised to show Miss Varley some gardens outside the gates."

Mr. Ferris was silent a moment.

"Stuart has gone away, I think Davenant told me?"

"Stuart," said Mr. Lawrence, looking his friend steadily in the face, "has gone for four or five days to Baalbeck."

"I suppose you have told them all—the people down there at the hotel, I mean—that you were leaving?"

The young man coloured slightly. "I have not mentioned it. I have not seen anyone since it was finally decided; it is not a matter of such very great importance," looking out of the window absently. "I hate to have my affairs discussed by a lot of women," he said with sudden irritation.

Mr. Ferris smiled significantly. "I took a curious liking to that girl, you know," he added presently with a certain irrelevance, and Denis did not ask him what he meant. In the silence which followed there came a knock upon the studio-door. "I say, Lawrence—hallo, Ferris, and how did you come here?—I say, Lawrence, there's a boy out here who's asking after you," said Davenant, putting in his head.

He came in and looked about him disconsolately. "I hate these changes. I wish I had not come to spoil my old impression. Do have that boy in, Lawrence.

He's got a beautiful face, I noticed, and it will be something to look at," with a reproachful glance at the bare walls.

The boy was the same boy Jew of whom mention has been made already; a half-grown lad, whom Denis had picked up between two and three o'clock on a bitter March morning, half starved and nearly speechless with the cold. He had been turned out of the house where he worked some day or two before, and had been living in any way he could ever since, prowling about the bazaars by day, and fighting with the pariah dogs for the warmest corner at night. On further inquiry he admitted frankly that he had been turned out for stealing his late master's dinner. He also remarked casually that that was the way he had been getting his dinners ever since, and there was a naïve unconcern about his way of mentioning the fact which appealed for-

cibly to Lawrence's taste for the morally picturesque. He took the boy home with him that night from motives which, I am bound to admit, had more to do with the state of the temperature and the relative thickness of their coats than with the higher forms of justice; and the lad had attached himself persistently to the young man ever since, carrying his painting-traps from place to place, spending whole days waiting for him outside the doorstep—a loyal and patient and utterly irresponsible little scamp.

He came in now, carrying a small folded package which he placed listlessly upon the nearest table. He went and leaned against the wall, an effeminate supple figure in scarlet and white, gazing calmly at the three young men with his still dark oriental eyes. "And what will become of that fellow when you leave?" said Ferris.

"Oh, I take the boy with me. That is the worst of playing amateur providence," with a careless look and laugh.

"You are always picking up desperate characters, Lawrence. You will have to be suppressed some day from motives of sound political economy," said George.

The package had come unfastened as the boy laid it down; some yellow beads were lying on the table.

"More tribute to the beautiful Ayassa? If it's anything worth looking at I wish you would hang it up in a conspicuous place. These naked walls are simply intolerable," said Davenant, putting his hand to his eyes as though they ached.

Denis laughed. "It is only a string of beads I have been having mended for Miss Varley."

But he neither touched nor looked at them until the others had left him, and even

then he hesitated a moment before taking the bauble into his hands. A man with something of a woman's sentiment for trifles I have called him; he looked at these beads now with a curious attention, holding them a long while between his fingers, as though the mere contact brought him, in some mysterious way, in closer relation to their owner. He found some fanciful analogy between the impression the girl had made upon him and these smooth delicate circles of sunshine-coloured amber. "Something apart and mysterious and inimitable," he thought idly, slipping the yellow chaplet through his fingers, and, as about everything else which she had worn the day before, he noticed that about these beads there lingered the faint suggestion of clinging oriental perfume.

CHAPTER VIII.

"AFTER THREE YEARS."

THEY started. There was quite a little crowd collected about the doorway to see the young girl appear in her riding-dress. Mrs. Van Ness herself had come down into the courtyard where she stood leaning upon Fanny's arm, and watching her niece's movements with coldly-unfavourable eyes.

"And to think, my dear, that your husband should insist upon finishing that sketch before he starts. A man of his age! It is really too ridiculous," she said with sudden exasperation, as the injudicious

Lione brushed by her with one of his ecstatic bounds.

"I am sure, Aunt Van, if you knew the trouble I have had in persuading him to go at all;" Fanny protested in her plaintive little voice.

And then they both turned to look at the tall erect girl moving swiftly down the winding stair, and holding up her habit and fastening her gloves as she came.

"Such a lovely day, Aunt Van! Down sir; be quiet, Lione! Such a day for a ride!" she said with such frank eager joyousness in all her manner that even Mrs. Van Ness was startled for the moment into something very like assent; and it was only when they had started down the street together, Miss Varley's horse shying and prancing at every wave of Lione's golden-brown ears—it was only when the two were fairly off upon their expedition that the

old lady devoted herself to the pleasing task of finding fault with Fanny, which she did with an ingenuity of insinuation and a calm severity of conclusion which would, I fear, have afforded a certain grim and retributive satisfaction to the Major.

"For I find something shocking, positively shocking, quite *inconvenant*, in the way you allow Constance to dispose of her own time. Constance has a will of her own? Nonsense, Fanny! A woman of your age," looking Mrs. Thayer stonily in the face, "should know how to manage better than that. There, my dear, you need not answer me. I know what I am saying perfectly well. I consider," said Mrs. Van Ness calmly, "that my niece is as good as engaged to young Stuart. She does not think so, but I do. And under the circumstances nothing could be in more deplorable taste than the slightest suspicion of a flirtation

with Mr. Lawrence—a charming young fellow; a capital listener; rather different in that respect from your husband, my dear Fanny, who never seems to be aware that I am speaking—a charming young fellow," said Mrs. Van Ness majestically, "but *not* a marrying man."

But this was a consideration which did not seem to have occurred to either of the two young people. It would have been difficult indeed to have found two people more thoroughly well satisfied than they, as they picked their way leisurely along the crowded streets, the horses slipping and starting over the smooth round stones until the noise of the clattering hoofs overpowered every other sound; and their riders were silent, only turning their heads from time to time to exchange a well-contented glance. Once, as they were passing Ahmed's house, the cries of the camels frightened

Miss Varley's horse, who shied violently across the road. She was a brave rider and independent to a fault, but now, when Lawrence laid his hand upon her reins, she gave them up without a word. It seemed the most natural thing to them both that he should have assumed entire control of their movements. He spoke of it once:

"I am taking it for granted that I know which way you wish to go," he said smiling.

She looked up brightly.

"I like to be tyrannised over," she said, and then, all at once, it seemed to her that she had always liked it.

They rode on. Some half-a-dozen Turkish soldiers were lounging and smoking about the city-gate; a laden camel was crouching by the roadside; a heavy ordnance-waggon jolted noisily on before them between two lines of sordid yellow wall; a few paces more, and a palm-tree nodded to them from

some hidden garden, the creaking waggon stopped with a clank before the barrack-door, another gate lifted before them its piles of Roman masonry.

"Now!" said Lawrence, pointing with his whip. The horses sprang forward with a common impulse. The river rushed and foamed on a level with the turf bordering the wide white road; and there were tall green poplar-trees standing deep in the limpid water, and all strong vigorous-growing things were there—tall bulrushes, and low thick willows, and dark beds of lily-leaves up-springing greenly beneath a pale and luminous sky.

"At last!" said Lawrence, drawing a deep breath.

She looked all about her, and laughed for very joy. "At last!"

And then for many minutes there was no other word spoken; no sound but the muffled beat of horses' hoofs sweeping along

in quickening cadence on a line with the water's flow.

It would be difficult to say what the young girl was experiencing in those moments. A feeling of wild delight and of unreality—above all, a sentiment of unreality mingled in the strangest fashion with the purely physical exultation in rapid motion and the touch of the warm moist wind. It was a gray, sunless day, but the horses stopped of their own accord at the foot of the second hill, panting deep breaths, with heaving flanks and breasts all streaked and shining with heat.

"There must be a touch of khemseen in the air. We shall have to take it a little more quietly," said Denis, leaning back in his saddle, and pulling off his hat.

They went on at foot-pace. In that

first long gallop they had left all sight, all suggestion of the city far behind. They were passing now between two long lines of blossoming orchards, deep walled-in spaces of white and spreading boughs.

When they ceased to ride fast the day seemed to grow more still; there was not a breath of wind stirring, not a sound; they were entirely alone, only all about them there were great dome-like masses of bloom and whiteness rising up against the gray of the sky. The river, too, had wandered away; but when they listened they could catch a hundred faint murmuring sounds of water, the voice of countless unseen brooks deep hidden in the orchard-grass. It was like some forgotten day which had strayed back from its place in the very early spring; the atmosphere was tepid and moist, as on some silent afternoon in April, with every now

and then a thrill of warmer and more enervating air. The sky was low and gray and restless. The horses were content to walk on slowly, whinnying from time to time, and striking the ground with impatient feet.

Once, when they were passing before a high wooden paling, Lawrence pointed out the place to her.

"Ahmed's garden. I have had it opened for you. I told the Major to meet us there. We will dismount, and go in and see it, if you like, on our way back."

"You must positively let me get a sketch of you to-day," he said, a moment later. "The merest outline, a pencil-note will be enough; but I want it this afternoon."

She smiled, well pleased. "Whenever you like—to-day or to-morrow."

"You have been telling me that for the last three days," said Denis.

"Is it really only three days since we came here?" with a startled glance. "Why, it seems——" She hesitated, a sudden realisation of what those three days counted for in her life sweeping over her and checking her speech. "But you shall have the sketch whenever you please," she said hurriedly.

"I hardly think that I shall have time to-morrow——" He paused so long that she looked up surprised.

"To-morrow?"

He opened his lips to speak of his journey. I do not know what impulse it was which kept him silent. The day was so harmonious; they were both so contented; there seemed something absolutely brutal in marring this fine unison with any thought of change. And with those questioning blue eyes fixed upon his face it seemed easier to speak of anything but leaving.

"Tell me what was the matter with you last night," he said, putting out his hand, and drawing a wisp of her horse's thin mane through his fingers. "I wanted to ask you several times."

Her cheek flushed a little. "You? Why, you were talking to my aunt," she said evasively.

"I have made a very good impression on Mrs. Van Ness," said Lawrence smiling. "And, by-the-way, she has not told you that I am a very charming fellow?"

"Never!"

"Ah, well, that is all to come then. You wait and see. I am exceedingly charming — quite remarkably so, in fact; and when I go home to New York, whenever that event may occur, I am to be invited to a dinner in consequence; to a little dinner."

"Only eight?"

"Only eight, of course. I call that exceedingly disrespectful of you, Miss Varley."

She laughed. "And yet I am fond of my aunt, you know—in a fashion."

"So is Mrs. Thayer." He dropped the lock of coarse black hair, and straightened himself suddenly in his saddle. "You will not tell me why you were so sad last night, then?" looking keenly at her.

She was silent, the flush deepening upon her face—a girl made reticent by temperament as well as habit, unused to sympathy. She would have told him anything; but even to herself the words seemed meagre and unsatisfactory when they came. But it was impossible he should not understand.

"Mr. Stuart had told me he was going away. It is only for a few days, but I knew it was my fault, and—— There are

some things that seem so hard to do. I could not help being sorry," her eyes filling suddenly with tears.

He was the only person who would understand her. It was so easy, so natural to tell him everything. She turned to him now eagerly. "And then Aunt Van had been finding fault with me all the morning, you know."

"About Mr. Stuart?"

She looked up relieved. It was plain he *must* understand to have asked that question. There was something in the expression of his face which made her shrink back doubtfully, the same baffled disappointed feeling of last night creeping over her. And yet he had not said a word; he was only looking straight ahead at the long empty road, his hand resting carelessly on his horse's neck.

"It was about Mr. Stuart?"

He turned and repeated his question gravely; and somehow, she could not have told why, but it seemed to her that there was more in his meaning than in the simple words. Yet she answered him with all her customary directness.

"Yes; about Mr. Stuart."

"Aunt Van does not mean any harm," she said incoherently, a moment later, bending over to stroke the horse between his eyes; "I would not like you to think that. Only one's relatives have a way of expecting you to be happy after their own ideas of happiness; although, I must say, my experience of near relatives is rather limited. I think there cannot be many girls with so few people belonging to them as I——" breaking off with a confused laugh.

He looked at her fixedly for a minute or two. "Is Mrs. Van Ness your only aunt?

Tell me all about her. Tell me something more about yourself. It seems curious to think how little I know about you in reality," bending forward a little with one of his rare sudden smiles. Whatever might have been the motive which had made him irresponsive, it was plain that he had rid himself of its influence for the nonce. "Tell me," he said; and she no more hesitated to grow communicative at his bidding than one of the blossoms about them would have hesitated about unfolding its petals in the sun.

There was so little to tell, she answered. Mrs. Van Ness was her only near connection; yes. "Aunt Van was my mother's half-sister, and much, very much the elder of the two. My mother was only twenty when she died," the girl said softly. "My father has a picture of her taken just after their marriage, an old-

fashioned pastel thing, with pink cheeks and her hair all brushed back; but I think it must have been a good likeness, it looks so very much like me."

She was silent for a moment, looking out wistfully at the sweet spring fields. "She was only twenty, younger than I am," she repeatedly softly, "only twenty, and my father loved her so dearly, and she died. You see, I can't help caring for Aunt Van a little, can I?" turning to Lawrence with a sudden appeal.

She was so near that he could see the very quivering of her lips. He put up his hand to his own mouth uneasily, smoothing down the ends of his moustache. "Engaged to marry Stuart," he reminded himself once or twice; chance words out of Mrs. Van Ness's confidences coming back with gathering meaning. "Damn the woman!" he thought savagely.

"You ought to wish me joy," he said to Constance a moment later; "this is my birthday. To-day I'm thirty-one. I suppose that is a reason for being congratulated?"

"Eight, nine—only nine years older than I," said Constance.

He nodded. "Nine years in point of fact, perhaps, but I am incalculably older than you in reality. Why, I had half got through with life before I was your age. There must be centuries of experience between us by this time," with a sudden tone in his voice which seemed to push her miles away.

She looked up at him with a patient puzzled glance. She had done nothing; there was no reason he should be unkind to her, with a sudden childish passion of resentment. It was unkind, unjust.

"You should take that horse up a little

more on his curb, Miss Varley. So. These Arab horses are unreliable brutes. And I can't be responsible for you if you are not obedient," adjusting the reins slowly, and looking into her face the while. He saw something there which seemed to amuse him. "Yes, it is my birthday. We used to have a way of celebrating our birthdays when I was a boy at home: presents first, of course; and then, before we went to sleep at night, a sort of general confession, an overhauling of all the year's mistakes. I used to look forward to that part of it with a sort of nervous horror when I was a little fellow; it is only as one gets older that one learns to take a paternal interest in the enumeration of one's faults."

She bent down and touched Lione's head with the lash of her riding-whip.

"Well?"

"Now you are very proud," watching her

averted face with the same attentive amusement. "A few years ago, if anyone had told you that, you would have felt very unhappy about it and promised to reform; and now—I want you to observe how the best of us degenerate—you are playing with your dog and thinking——"

She looked up and laughed.

"Well?" closing her mouth defiantly.

"The Sphinx in person? No; I don't read thoughts. Your pride is so much a part of you," he said suddenly, "that I honestly believe it would be easier for you to stand by and see your dearest hope founder than put out your hand or save it by a word."

She turned to him with a startled air.

"Would I? I don't know," the colour rising suddenly about her throat and cheek.

"I know it," said Lawrence gravely. "Now, my own faults—my own faults,"

flicking his horse's ears, with a frank careless laugh, "are vastly worse, belong to quite a lower order of moral turpitude. For one thing, I am more easily diverted from my purpose than anyone you ever knew. I should call it a certain plasticity of nature if I were describing the trait to an outsider; but between you and me," confidentially, "I think it is a horribly mortifying fact. My only line of self-defence is a sort of stony obduracy," laughing. "For if I once begin to listen to the voice of the charmer!—— And the worst of it is that it isn't people alone, but days, places, the very commonest things which influence me. Why, the mere fact that the wind is blowing from a certain quarter—— I'm like a French revolution—you know the story?" with a sudden touch of mockery—"I can't build my barricades if it rains."

"But that is only one fault—if you call

it a fault," said Constance seriously. "For my part I think I am just a little tired of hermetically-sealed natures. At least—I don't know—— The outside world seems to me to be something more than just a side-scene or a farm."

"Did it ever occur to you that there might be people yet, susceptible to precisely those influences which the Greeks embodied in all the wild and beautiful creatures of the water and the woods—in fauns and dryads and the shy white nymphs? It's all very well to call that sort of thing mythical," said Lawrence, "but it was no more a fiction than the religion of the Egyptians was a fiction until the Greeks appeared, or than the religion of the early Hebrews, with all its strange admixture of idol worship and curious Chaldean lore. Why, the high places of these very hills around us were once as sacred to unseen

and beautiful or terrible presences as the most nymph-haunted wood in Greece. And who knows what tales will be told in the course of some thousand years of a religion which peopled the remote and silent places of mountain and forest and lagoon, with wayside shrines and crosses, until there is hardly a spot in Catholic Europe untenanted by the effigy of a god? And then all the long litany of saints—— It will not be difficult for our descendants to trace out our mythology, I fancy."

Constance smiled.

"The plastic nature again, Mr. Lawrence? I might have thought Mr. Davenant was speaking if I had shut my eyes."

"Oh, come now," said Denis hastily; "I said plastic, you know, not imitative. I believe in the niceties of language, Miss Varley——"

"In discussing your faults?"

"In speaking of myself generally. And I don't know about the wisdom of confessing any further. It might affect your present opinion——"

"Try me," said Constance, with her clear confident glance.

The horses had been moving on while they were talking. They had reached the extreme limit of the Field of Damascus, a vast and undulating plain of reddish soil, streaked here and there with lines and patches of young grass. The circling hills seemed nearer and darker under this effect of colourless sky, and between them and that farther range of mountains they could catch a gleam of silvery-looking water, a still, unruffled lake, at which Lawrence glanced curiously from time to time.

"Do you think it would be too far for us to ride out there?" Constance asked, pointing to the water with her whip.

He looked at her gaily.

"If one could get there! It is odd enough, but this place, this red clay soil and that gap over there in the hills, remind me so strongly of a certain part of Virginia. I spent part of a summer there once."

"I know," the girl said eagerly; "when you were fighting, when you were in the war."

"When I was looking on at other people fighting, you mean."

"Ah," she said, turning quickly, with a great light in her face. "I know more about it than you think. I know what you did. I know—the Major has told me."

"The Major is growing imaginative. But a woman will never understand what a plain prosaic thing the greater part of a war must be. You forget the camp-life and the tedium and the dulness. And you're right about that, perhaps; there's

nothing very heroic in bad rations and muddy roads — and toothache. I think that was one of the greatest shocks I ever had in my life" (laughing); "the first time I slept under canvas there were three men in my tent with the toothache. I went down there with the idea that every man fighting for the North was something between a martyr and a hero, and I found them grumbling over a camp-fire with their faces tied up in handkerchiefs like so many old women. Fancy indulging in hero worship about a man who swore at you for not being a professional dentist!"

"But you did other things beside that," she insisted; "you were in a battle; you were wounded yourself trying to help some wounded men; Tom has told me. And I think I would rather have done that — what you did — than——" She bent down and examined the buckle of her reins

critically. "I wish you would tell me all about it," the light growing bright and steady in her eyes.

"But you know it all; there isn't any story" said Lawrence quietly. "There were a lot of us down there. I wasn't a soldier myself, you know."

She nodded.

"I know. You were one of the Sanitary Commission people; you were taking care of the poor men in the hospitals, saving their lives——"

"And trying to keep them provided with tolerable soup and biscuits. We might as well stick to facts while we are about it, Miss Varley. Well—I really don't know how to make anything out of such an unromantic experience. I happened to be out with the ambulance-men one day. There had been a lively skirmish going on for a couple of days all along the front,

and a good many men were missing, shot or bushwhacked, we did not know which; and so, as I said before, some of us started out to look them up. We knew where we were going when we started—to a place where they had driven in our pickets the night before."

"Yes!"

"Well, we got there and found a couple of graycoats alive still—our men had come down on them so quick that they hadn't time to carry off their wounded, so we sent these two into camp on stretchers. They both died on their way there, poor devils! and we started for home ourselves. And then—I really can't tell you how it happened—there was a lot of firing, and we all started down the hill at a run, dodging in and out behind the trees, and the first thing I knew I tripped over something and found myself lying on my back among the

sassafras-bushes with a couple of bullets in me."

She nodded gravely, rubbing the buckle softly with the finger of her glove.

"Go on!"

"Well, that was about the end of it, as far as I was concerned. I suppose I must have fainted then—loss of blood and all that sort of thing, you know—because, when I opened my eyes again, I could see the stars shining down between the sides of the gully. It was a beautiful starlight night, I remember, and I could see everything about me—the cracks in the rocks, and the leaves on the bushes nearest me, and then the face of the man—the man I stumbled over, you know."

She looked up.

"I suppose he had been dead a good while," said Lawrence slowly; "a young fellow—he looked like a gentleman, too,

with long hair like a young Virginian. I couldn't move much, you know, so I just lay still and looked at him: he had a fine face, not disfigured in the least. And then towards morning it got awfully cold, and then I felt as though somebody was sawing me in two with a piece of red-hot iron; well, that was pretty bad. And then two or three times I died. And every time I came to, there was this fellow lying still beside me, with his eyes wide open; and at last I got so that I found a sort of companionship in having him there; and I suppose I went off my head a little, for I remember quite well hearing myself speaking to him, and saying the most beautiful things you can imagine about death and immortality — and swearing frightfully all the while."

"And then?"

"Well, then—but this was after an in-

terval of two or three hundred years, you know, and I did not much care what happened—then, just before daybreak, I saw some lights moving through the bushes, and I heard the voices of some men, and I couldn't call out to them. Perhaps that was the worst moment of it all, when I found I could not speak above a whisper. However, they came up all the same—I warned you in the beginning that it was a very mild tragedy, Miss Varley—and one of them put his lantern down over the top of my bush——"

"And then, what did he do? what did he say?" asked Constance.

Lawrence looked up and laughed. "He said—I was in civilian's dress, you know—he said, 'Hollo, here's another of those d——d newspaper correspondents;' and that put me in an awful rage, because I knew the man by sight; his name was Jackson. So I bided

my time, and the moment they had poured some brandy down my throat I opened my eyes as wide as I could, and I said: 'Don't be a fool, Bill Jackson;' and there, as far as I know, the war ended. It was nothing but surgeons and hospital-gruel after that."

He gathered his reins together as he ceased speaking, and the horses went off across the plain at a gallop. "You still want to go as far as that lake?" he asked presently, looking back over his shoulder at Constance.

Something in his tone puzzled her. "If it is not too far," she began doubtfully, trying to see what he meant by his face. "Is there anything peculiar—I don't quite understand. Is anything the matter with that lake, Mr. Lawrence?"

"Look at Lione," motioning with his whip.

The dog had been bounding on before

them, he had reached the edge of the gleaming water now, and ran straight forward, the shining waves parting and falling away from him on either side.

"It is the mirage," said Denis quietly; "is it possible you did not know it? But indeed I hardly remember ever having seen such a perfect one before."

"Mirage?" she repeated incredulously.

They checked their horses and stood still looking at it. The wide shining expanse of water lay apparently but a stone's throw off, seeming to gather into itself and focus all the light of the day and sky. "Mirage," said Constance slowly. She forced a smile, even tried to laugh, when Lawrence insisted that they ought to ride on until they reached the lake, since that had been her object; but the laugh proved a failure; there was something strangely disconcerting about the illusion just then.

"And I thought—I had meant that to be the end of our ride," she said, with a touch of superstitious regret. It was the merest folly, but it sufficed to make her face a little graver as they turned their horses' heads homewards. And on the crest of the hill she paused and looked back at the still and glittering phantasm with a sudden shiver of dumb unreasonable dread.

"Are you looking for Lione?" the young man asked carelessly. "He has passed us already, I saw him running down the road."

"Oh, he has learned to take care of himself."

She answered lightly, but it was not so easy to shake off the disturbing impression. Now, at this moment, when her life seemed trembling in the balance for good or ill, the slightest incident, a word, a look, seemed to have gained a sudden vital importance. There were no trifles in Miss Varley's eyes

to-day. They went back by another road. The river had joined them again; full-fed and swift and silent beneath its canopy of boughs. And now, in attempting a short cut, they passed through an abandoned Turkish cemetery — hundreds of ruined stones crowding about the white-domed tomb of a *santon*. It was a singularly deserted looking place, all overgrown with thick rank grass. A peach-tree leaned its full and pink-tipped branches against the weather-beaten grave, and one small twig which had burst into premature blossom brushed its rose-coloured petals against Lawrence's shoulder, as the riders picked their way between the fallen stones.

"Ah, there is something for you. You must have that," the young man said, bending from his saddle.

> Flower o' the peach—
> Death for us all and his own life for each.

"Here, Miss Varley."

She took the blossoms silently, and fastened them in her dress. They made a pretty spot of colour there, Lawrence told her, glancing back. "You always used to wear flowers. I never remember having seen you at The Farm without some flowers about you. I always thought I had a good memory for details, but I never knew how good it was until within these last few days," he said, watching her curiously.

She caught his look and turned her face away.

"I remember things a long while. We shall be late, I am afraid, Mr. Lawrence. You said the Major was to meet us, I believe?" with a sudden hurry in her voice.

She looked down at her blossoms two or three times as they cantered along the road, putting up her hand to touch them. It was a long time since he had given her flowers.

When they reached the gate of Ahmed's garden they both dismounted, Lawrence leading the horses by their bridles along the narrow path. It was a large and green enclosure which they now entered; a vegetable garden at first; a place thick-set with apricot-trees, divided into squares by countless small channels of running water, the ground quite covered by thick, dark, spreading leaves. Farther on was an open space of grass, where Lawrence tethered the horses, and beyond that the ground sloped rapidly down to the river; a long white stretch of trees in fullest bloom.

They took a path which led them to the water. The fruit-trees met and branched above their heads; thick foam-white masses of cherry-blossom, and sturdy apple-boughs, all clustered over with crisp rosy flowers, and the frail shivering beauty of the pear. And here, in these sheltered places, were

young peach-trees, with bare shining stems, and here and there a single rose-flushed star; and down in the hollows the full-petalled flesh-coloured quince-blossoms, which opened wide among the coarser leaves. It was not an orchard; it could not be called a flower-garden; it was only a place of blossoming—the home of all strong green things; for here were broad-leaved vines climbing between the branches, and a tangled network of rose-bushes covered all over with large green rosebuds streaked with dullest red; and on the ground the grass was gay with tall rank buttercups and the flaunting yellow of the melon-flower; and by the edge of the river were all thick growths of water-plants, and leafy lisping poplars—"the verdurous wall of Paradise;" and everywhere the clean moist smell of the earth, the feeling of abundant moving water, the sense of exuberant vegetable life.

There was something in the languid softness of the air which made the slightest movement an exertion. They rested now, warm and breathless, upon a dark elastic couch of lily-leaves close by the river's brink. A pale and silvery sunshine was breaking through the clouds.

"Listen! it seems as though one could almost hear the things growing in this stillness," Constance said; and then for several minutes they were silent, she fanning herself slowly with a bunch of the stiff lily-leaves, and Denis lying upon his back, his hands clasped behind his head, looking up at the gray sky through the motionless white boughs.

It was a delicious moment of satisfied animal existence. They could feel themselves living, a part of all the still strong life about them, growing slowly conscious of a hundred well-nigh imperceptible sights

and sounds—the varying voice of the water, and sudden mysterious thrills and shivers among the leaves where not a breath of air was stirring—a whole new world of noiseless insect-existence; the low sharp note of some passing bird; the ceaseless dropping of over-blown petals into deep grass.

In the intervals of sunshine the trees seemed to grow larger and whiter.

"How far can you see?" the young girl asked, after a long pause. "A moment ago all the line of that hill came out in shadow, and there, between those poplars, I could see something shining, a line of yellow close to the horizon—a line of desert sands."

"The desert!" repeated Lawrence vaguely. "'In the desert love builds triumphal arches out of the shifting sands.' That is a Persian proverb, you know. I think," picking up a dead bit of wood and snapping it in two between his fingers with

a sudden impatient recollection of Stuart, "I think it is an everyday fact."

He tossed the broken splinters in the stream and sat up abruptly. The charm of silence was broken with the first intrusion—even the imaginary intrusion—of another personality. He sat up now and talked, talked to her with an impulse of confidence which he had never felt but once before in his life towards any woman. They spoke of many things, but it was noticeable they spoke more of things than of people; of books which they had read; of impressions which they had received; of a hundred personal fancies and desires peculiar to each and yet shared or understood by the other.

"You are the only person I ever met who reminded me of my mother," Lawrence said to her once. "No two people could have grown up under more widely-differing in-

fluences, and yet there is something—a certain quality of nature. She was, in one sense of the word, an ignorant woman ; she never cared for politics or literature ; she lived and died a fervent Roman Catholic, an ardent Southerner and believer in the divine right of slavery—there is hardly a point on which, as I grew older, we two were agreed ; —and yet, when I remember her now, I can see that there has never been a good impulse in my life, a love of the beautiful, a recognition of high purpose in others, which I cannot trace directly to my mother's influence. She was a woman who evoked goodness in others as the sun brings life out of the frozen earth," he said slowly, with a sudden thrill of emotion in his well-controlled voice.

It was the first time since she had known him that Constance had heard him speak of his early life. She listened to him now

with a silent passionate tenderness, extending back through all those unknown years, for she was curiously ignorant of all but the most evident facts of that past. Lawrence was a man who seldom spoke of himself; and since the very first days of their acquaintance, in speaking to others, his name had never crossed her lips.

As he talked to her now of those old boyish days, he seemed, with every careless familiar detail, to grow nearer and more inexpressibly dear; and at every word she shrank more into herself, growing more reserved and silent. She had been used to think of him as of an ideal, isolated, away from the contact of common associations and ties; and this new aspect of his life impressed her with a curious sense of bewilderment; it seemed so full and self-sufficing an existence, and she so much a stranger to it all.

She had asked him some question about his mother.

"The girls—my sisters—were never so intimate with her," he said. "I don't know how it was, but in some way we two always seemed to belong more particularly to one another. Long after I was grown up we were in the habit of going off constantly on expeditions, travelling, amusing ourselves together, until I was quite a young man, until" (with a sudden effort) "I married."

She bent her head, keeping her eyes fixed upon the water. "Yes," she said gravely, "I know."

But there had been something in the words which jarred upon them both. The girl rose hastily a moment after. "If we should miss the Major! You told him to meet us at the gate yonder," in a tone which seemed to put an end to the discussion.

She followed him silently to the gate. It was something which she had never felt before—this dumb and burning passion. They had never hitherto been thrown into close enough personal relations to evoke a feeling of jealousy, but now—— Her hand trembled at his touch as he helped her into the saddle, but the eyes which met his glance were steady as ever and unspeakably sad. It was a look he remembered long after; at the moment it had slipped aside, crowded out of mind by the merest detail of fact. For the Major was nowhere to be seen.

"If you really care about meeting him, we might walk our horses back as far as the cross-roads. He is after his time now. We are sure to find him at the turning."

They started back accordingly. The day had grown darker; the uniform gray sky was parting now, torn into jagged flying

strips of cloud. "A sea-sky, that," Lawrence remarked idly, glancing up at the hurrying and vexed mists. The words seemed to bring back some other recollection.

"I had a letter from a friend of mine. You have been at Nahant, Miss Varley?" looking at her with a new attention.

"Yes."

"You went a good deal into society there? you knew a great many people?"

"I was staying with my aunt last summer. Yes, we went out a great deal. I did not like it," she said indifferently.

"I had a letter from a man there, a day or two ago. I daresay you know him—Morris Stuyvesant. He and I are rather old friends."

It amused him for the moment to see the effect of his words in the sudden colour which flushed across her cheek. But she answered with the simple straightforward-

ness which gave a purpose and a meaning to her slightest word. "I did know Mr. Stuyvesant. He is a friend of my aunt's. I should not have thought," looking at him gravely, "that you would have made Mr. Stuyvesant a friend of yours."

He did not reply at once, and when he did it was only to say quietly, "One has to know all kinds of men. I've seen a great many worse fellows than Stuyvesant," but he was annoyed at himself all the same; he felt fastidiously irritated at the thought of having introduced this stranger's name between them. It suited him for the moment to ignore everything but the pleasure of this frank responsive companionship; and already a dozen things had occurred since they started to remind him of the limitations set all about their intercourse. This one spring afternoon might be all that they should know of each other for years,

he thought regretfully; for as Mr. Stuart's wife—— And then he looked away across the opening fields before them. But was it true? he asked himself. Was it?

"If you don't mind waiting here a moment, the Major is sure to join us now in a minute or two," he said aloud; "and meanwhile I might get my drawing."

He drew a small sketch-book out of his pocket as he spoke. They had halted at the turning of two roads. Behind them lay the foamy sea of blossoms, before them, the bare and melancholy plain stretched to the city-walls. The tepid fitful wind blowing across these open spaces came to them sweet with inexplicable sweetness, and faint with all the langour of the spring. It was the hour for sunset, but the sad gray sky hung pale and irresponsive above the empty plain. It was only far off and low down by the horizon that a warmer flush—a colour pale

as the later crocus which comes with the autumn skies—showed where the day was dying slowly behind the shadowy hills.

Denis had nearly finished his sketch. He lingered over his work for a moment, looking up from his drawing at the pure and noble outline of the face before him. In those few days it had already become associated in his mind with some of the loveliest things in nature, with soft and limpid skies, spring winds, and all the large and liberal stirring of life about the new-born year. But now he looked at her with something of a more personal feeling; with an irritated chafing at the very vagueness of their relations, with a sudden desire to break out of this charmed space of silence into whatever of real life for good or ill might lie beyond. His journey, his plans, his intentions, had sunk into the insignificance of a dream.

All the refining of sentiment, the hesitation which was natural to him had abandoned him at this moment. The whole world seemed to have narrowed down to this; an open plain, a sad spring twilight, and the face of this silent girl.

But he made an effort to speak in his ordinary tone. "You have forgotten that I had something of yours all this time, and yet I think it is something you care for," putting his hand in his breast-pocket and drawing out her amber beads. "You will let me put them on for you?" His own voice sounded to him uncertain and strange. She held out her bared wrist without speaking, and he wound the string of beads about it awkwardly, his fingers growing suddenly irresolute as they touched the firm white skin.

She drew back shivering. "I think—I mean——"

She turned her head abruptly, put out her hand and picked a leaf from off the nearest branch, and looked at it, and threw it away.

There was a long silence after this. He was sitting with his hand upon the crutch of her saddle. From far down the darkening road came the muffled clatter of horsemen riding fast; their own horses stirred uneasily at the sound, pricking up their ears, with a low whinny of expectation. "I hear someone coming," said Constance beneath her breath.

He did not heed her speaking. "I want to ask you something," he said irresolutely. He passed his hand quickly over his face and looked at her. "I ought not to have spoken to you about Stuyvesant. I knew that you had refused to marry him. I thought I would like to ask you why—if it was, because——" To save his life he could not have mentioned Stuart's name at

that moment. "Do you love anyone else," he said brusquely, with a sudden determination to face and know the truth.

She shivered again as though the wind had struck her. For three years she had waited for some such moment, and now words failed her; she tried to speak, and felt her lips tremble. She could not look at him; and *now* did he not understand. And then through the silence she heard the measured hoof-beats coming nearer and nearer.

"I did not marry Mr. Stuyvesant," repeating his words blindly, "because I loved someone else. Because—— It is three years now—three years——"

"That you love Stuart? I knew it!" He spoke the words out sharply, putting up his hand as though to prevent her saying them. "I think—— God knows," with a sudden generous effort, "I hope you will

both be happy. He—he is a good fellow, Stuart. He deserves his luck."

He was careful not to look at her as he spoke, keeping his face turned towards the approaching riders, jealously careful of anything which might cast so much as a shadow over the happy unconsciousness of her love. Every tender, every chivalric instinct in his nature had been touched by the brave simplicity of her confession. He was silent now until he could command his voice fully. "That is the Major and Hassan, of course; but I cannot make out the third figure," he said.

The men were drawing rapidly nearer, and now the Major raised his hat to Constance.

"So sorry to have kept you waiting," his kindly old voice ringing cheerily through the twilight; "but I bring news, Lawrence. You're under marching orders

again, my boy," bringing up his horse alongside of them. "Here, Mustapha, Selim —what the deuce is the fellow's name? Give us a look at that paper."

The third rider was Lawrence's own servant, the little Jew boy, muffled in an Arab cloak. He came up now at a canter, waving a letter above his head: "From my Lord Ahmed, oh howadji."

The young man glanced over the scrawl eagerly.

"Oh, it's too late to read that now," the Major said, "why you'd require an hour to figure out those hieroglyphics; but we've brought the gist of it with us, my boy. They are in a dreadful state of excitement about you down there at the hotel. You haven't a moment to lose, you know, for your caravan starts for Bagdad, or the Mountains of the Moon, or wherever else you are going, to-night. That's what

you call short notice, eh, Constance? but it's nothing to what we were used to in the old army days."

The girl was looking down vacantly at the reins between her fingers. She gathered them tighter together now. "I think we had better ride fast to the hotel. Mr. Lawrence will be hurried," in a subdued monotonous voice.

The Major laughed. "As practical as ever, Constance! But you are quite right."

"Come along, Lawrence; Constance is right—you haven't a moment to loose. And you'll see that I shall be the only one to say I mean to miss you," turning his horse's head about with his shrewd good-humoured laugh.

It was not twenty minutes hard riding to the hotel-door. The courtyard was full of men when they entered. Old Ahmed had sent messenger after messenger, and there

was a sudden chatter of excited voices, a sudden pressing forward of urgent hands as Lawrence dismounted from his horse. He put them all aside impatiently, helping Constance out of the saddle, and following her to the foot of the stairs without a word.

"I'm sorry, very sorry, to say good-bye to you," he said simply.

It was growing dark in this walled-in place; one of the last comers had brought with him a lantern; the light flashed for an instant across the girl's white and rigid face, and then he could see nothing more but the silhouette of her figure relieving darkly against the wall.

"Come on, Lawrence! Look sharp about it, and I shall have time to ride round and see you fairly off before dinner."

She put out her hand with a sudden movement. "I hope you will be very happy, Mr. Lawrence. Good-bye."

He bent down over her hand and kissed it, but I think she was hardly conscious of it at the time. She turned, and left him standing at the foot of the stair, and looking after her as she had left him once before, but with what a difference!

Mrs. Thayer was passing down the upper gallery. The girl stopped and spoke to her. "Yes, a very pleasant ride, thank you. Mr. Lawrence is going, Fanny, if you care to say good-bye."

"What! going away?"

She looked back and nodded without speaking. The door of her room was standing open; she went in suddenly, and closed and locked this door behind her. Her room was in the front of the house; her window was still open as she had left it that morning; she could hear the sound of the men's voices, the clatter of hoofs upon the pavement below.

She crossed over slowly to where her small travelling-trunk had been thrown in one corner, bending over it and opening it with a curious deliberation. She took out a small sealed package and laid it upon the table, and then she lighted a candle, her gloved hands beginning to tremble a little, so that she had to strike three or four matches before she could get one to burn.

She tore off the paper covering and took out of it a journal. There were some loose papers, a sketch, a photograph lying upon it; but these she put carefully to one side, tearing out each leaf of the book methodically, and holding it over the flame until it curled and crumbled into ashes between her fingers. And, last of all, she took up the photograph. The fire charred and blackened it along the edges; she let it fall; she drew a long breath, leaning hard against the table, and then for the first

time she lifted up her eyes and saw herself in the glass.

"After three years!"

She looked down at her hands and began to pull off the blackened gloves nervously. The room was full of smoke and the pungent smell of burning paper. She looked over at the window through which the smoke was floating slowly out and melting into the quiet gray of the evening.

"After three years!" she repeated again slowly, looking down with a pitiful laugh at the dust of crumpled ashes on the floor. And then for a few minutes she ceased to think at all, standing there quite motionless long after the last red sparkle of fire had died away, and the last glimmer of light had sunk into ashes and dust.

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of her story Constance never knew—she never cared to ask. She accepted whatever came to her in those days with a silent and well-nigh dogged endurance, which rarely looked beyond the matter in hand.

Mrs. Thayer may have noticed that she was a trifle thinner and paler and more quiet than usual. Mrs. Van Ness patted her upon the shoulder and spoke of Constantinople. "When your nice young friend, Mr. Stuart, returns from Baalbeck, my dear——" And both of them rejoiced in private over this most fortunate turn of affairs, discussing the girl's possible disappointment placidly, with essentially feminine scepticism. And then they spoke eagerly of her probable establishment, and criticised the Stuart family at large, and were both of them as sincerely glad as they were both, in their different degrees, sincerely fond of Constance.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LAST LOOK BACK.

During the week which followed Ferris saw a good deal of Miss Varley.

By his quiet attention he managed very often to keep her occupied—shielded from the questions and observations of her aunt; and in thinking of these sad old days of her youth, she has often had occasion to remember and be grateful for an unobtrusive kindness of which at the time she was hardly aware.

The Major, too, was very good to her. How much he understood or had guessed

of her story Constance never knew—she never cared to ask. She accepted whatever came to her in those days with a silent and well-nigh dogged endurance, which rarely looked beyond the matter in hand.

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"If only Tom does not spoil it all with his foolishness!" Fanny sighed.

It was just a week after Lawrence's departure, and the Major had taken Constance out for a ride. They had gone again to Ahmed's garden.

When they reached the cross-roads the Major had proposed taking another direction.

"I should like to go back to where—to where we rode a few days ago," the girl answered steadily.

"As you please, my dear," turning about his horse's head with as much wonder over feminine perversity as could well be expected of a married man with a taste for philosophy.

And when they had reached the gate he let her go in alone.

"I shall stay here and sketch," rubbing his short gray beard doubtfully. He called

her back again as she was turning away. "Don't stay too long on the damp grass by that river, child. It's unhealthy—low, marshy ground. The whole country seems designed for frogs or angels. It's no place for human beings subject to rheumatism," fitting his palette leisurely across his strong large hand.

But there was no smile on his vigilant face as he watched her pass quietly out of sight between the rose-bush hedges. He looked after her with a rough tenderness which would rather have astonished Fanny.

"Poor little girl!" he said, shaking his grizzled head thoughtfully. It is possible that his thoughts had wandered back to a time when he too was young and most miserable. "If she could only know for how short a time it makes a difference," he said, and fell to painting philosophically

—life being brief, and moist water-colours a precarious possession at best in such a climate.

It was a sea-blue summer day. There was nothing about her, but had undergone some change since the last time Constance had walked between these hedges. The ineffable hesitation of the spring-time had vanished. Every note of colour was accentuated. The trees cast a deeper shadow across the path, the soft new grass was brilliant with new flowers, the reign of the blossoms was over, and in their place a thousand small green leaves were glistening in the sun. Already there was a new full breath of opening roses upon the drier air.

It was only down by the river that nothing was altered — neither the swift, smooth, abundant flowing of the water, nor the strong thick growth of the water-plants, nor the bitter smell of beds of lily-

leaves. She sat down under the same old poplar-tree; a ray of sunlight slipped between its branches, and the restless movement of the foliage kept a perpetual play of light leaf-shadows dancing about her hands and hair. She could not have told herself what motive had prompted her to revisit this place; only, through all the dreary days and nights through which she had been living, she had been haunted by a restless desire to come here once again; and now she drew a deep breath, and looked about her with the air of a person who has accomplished some purpose.

She leaned her face upon her hand and closed her eyes like one physically tired. And she was weary enough, poor child! weary of effort—of long and loyal and fruitless effort—and weary above all of idle questioning of fate. It might be easy now to see how all this could have been averted;

but even now, when she thought of it, her silence towards Lawrence seemed to her to have been the one inevitable fact; the only thing she could have done; the one moment to which she looked back with a sort of despairing pride. For he had congratulated her upon her marriage with Stuart. He had congratulated her!—closing her hands hard one upon the other, and looking down at them with a pitiful laugh.

And then for a moment all thought of self was swept away in one passionate revulsion of feeling, in one wild desire to see him, to be with him, to speak to him again —to see him for one moment.

She did not cry—these long years of repression, this life-long habit of self-control stood her now in good stead—but she turned and pressed her cheek against the rough bark of the tree. He had leaned there beside her only a week ago. She

put up her hand to her throat helplessly, her blue eyes growing dark and misty with a look of unutterable grief. It was the farewell of a loyal and patient heart—dumb and faithful even unto death.

For Constance had made up her mind to marry Stuart.

If she had not been thrown into close personal relation with Denis Lawrence it is possible—it is probable—that the devotion to this ideal might have sufficed for many years to fill her life. But once brought near to him, the old barriers broken down, the girl's dream had changed into the passionate love of the woman. There was no return possible to the old condition of things. For she did love him. He had never perhaps been so inexpressibly dear to her as at that moment. There was not a look, not a familiar gesture, the turn of his head, the trick of his voice, which she

did not remember, and go over again, and look at with a passion of hopeless pain—with something, it may be, of the yearning anguish of a mother looking upon the dead face of her child. For it was not a common love this girl was losing, it was the loyal love of all her life, that had grown with her growth, the ideal of her existence—it was more than all this, it was her youth which Constance Varley buried that day.

And she did love him. Whatever anyone else might think of Lawrence, he was to her still what he had always been—always, since the first day she had known him. Only, then she had loved him and hoped, and now the hope was dead.

She looked down at the stream flowing by her in cool and beautiful and unreturning waves, and there came to her at that moment a sudden revelation of the awful futility of all experience—the fatal passing

away of youth and love, of sorrow and joy, to one common and swift and inevitable end. The sunshine shone upon the abundant water; a thrush was singing rapturously to its mate among the hawthorn bushes; the full-leafed summer trees waved in the warm still air; the sky was of a deep and fleckless blue; there was not an object in all this beautiful world about her but rejoiced in the ample fruition of its life; and for the first time she felt herself an alien to it all—a troubled human soul, questioning, and unanswered and alone.

She thought of Stuart; the possibility of making him the happier for her own existence had come to represent to her the only significance of her life. It was what Denis's mother would have done in her place, she thought; that woman, "who was so sad in her own life she spent it all in making others happy." And then as she repeated the

words she could almost hear his voice saying them, and then again it seemed to her that she could not bear it. If she had ever cared in the least for Stuart, if she had ever felt the first spontaneous impulse of attraction towards him, she could never have decided to have married him then. But the thing came to her as a sacrifice; she herself had had one chance for happiness in life and lost it, and her first instinct was to put out her hand to give to another what she herself might never have.

For she had no illusions about that probable future. What life was coming to her she saw and understood, clearly and simply, with no mental reservations, with a despairing acceptance of duty and limitation alike.

To live, to comprehend the highest beauty, the profoundest significance of every passing moment; to know the ecstasy of love; to know the blessedness of possession, the rare

blessedness of gift—this is success in life, and this is happiness. But to make of suffering the key-note to another's pain; to learn from loneliness the pity for another's grief; to merge all sorrow, all despair, in one wide brotherhood of understanding—surely this, too, is success.

Success, but not happiness.

It is not happiness—but to the majority of human beings this absolute personal happiness will never come. We are young, and the world is ours to win; we are older, and the promise and the glory, "all those things are passed away like a shadow, and as a post that hasted by."

And in this brief life we all die many times—in friendship outgrown, in faith, in changed experience. Surely they too may be called blessed to whom this death comes quickly, to whom past love remains ideal, hidden away safe from the touch of

time and change, deep in some charmed and silent space of life.

But Constance was rather acting upon than thinking of these things. When, as she fancied, she had prepared herself to surrender all the old dreams, the old desires, she had not counted upon the influence of this place. It was here that she had come with Lawrence in the still spring afternoon which already seemed so far, so very far away; it was here—— Her hand in passing over her dress had brushed against some faded blossoms still fastened in it from the other day's ride, and now the only thing left to her out of all the days that had been. She sat looking at them quietly enough for a moment, and then her proud lips began to tremble, she put her hands out with a passionate gesture. "Oh my love!" she said aloud, and the bitter tears rose slowly to her eyes, as she said it, "oh my dear love, I could

have made you so happy if you had only let me!"

And then through the murmurous silence of the summer day, she heard the quick tramp of a man's step coming towards her through the grass. And then, for an instant, she leaned heavily against the tree, and her heart seemed beating up in her throat, and she felt her very lips grow cold.

It was Stuart who joined her there under the poplars. She knew it; she had known it all along; but she pressed her hand hard against her lip before she answered him; her voice seemed to have grown broken and beyond her control.

He came up rapidly and caught her hands in his. "Constance!"

It was not until long afterwards that he remembered that she had expressed no surprise at his sudden reappearance. "I—I have come back," he said breathlessly. "I

couldn't stay away any longer. And they told me at the hotel that you were out here and—— It's a very nice place you've found here," without taking his eyes off her face.

"Yes," said Constance.

"I saw old Tom at the gate, you know. Baalbeck is a fine old place, for a ruin. I should think one could get a little shooting out there occasionally; we saw some partridges. Tom asked me to tell you that he was ready to go," with a nervous laugh.

"I am ready," she answered gravely. And neither of them moved.

The low sunlight shining in beneath the trees filled all the space about them with a reddish glow. He stood and looked at her a moment in silence—the woman he loved.

The young fellow's voice had grown unsteady with excitement as he repeated her name.

"Constance!"

She turned her head and waited.

"I saw Davenant at Baalbeck. He is going to Palmyra——"

"I know."

"He said—he told me—— Lawrence has gone away, Constance."

She put her hand up to her throat suddenly. "Yes," in a sharp unnatural tone. "He has gone."

He did not care for her manner. It was the fact, not the words, he wanted. He came close by her now. Her hand was hanging by her side; he took it in his and looked down at it, lying, white and nerveless, in his grasp. "I told you I should come back, and I am here, Constance," closing his fingers slowly over hers as he spoke.

She looked at him now. "I will tell you something. You are very good to me,

Jack. I don't know why you should care for me. It is rather hard to understand, this life" (with a little pitiful smile) "but at least one can be honest. You say that—Mr. Lawrence——"

He put out his other hand quickly. "Don't speak to me of Mr. Lawrence, dear. You need not tell me. I don't want to know. We have all of us had our fancies for other people, I suppose," with blunt simplicity, a kind sweet-tempered look coming into his clear blue eyes. "I don't imagine you are different from other people. Heaven knows, I might not care to have to own up to all my own flirtations." He stopped abruptly and looked at her, the colour rising slowly to his handsome face. "I'm not afraid of Lawrence or of Stuyvesant," with a delicious thrill of triumph, "or of any other man, if you say once that you will be my wife. I—— You've got

all my life in your hands, Constance, and for the rest I trust you."

There was a moment of profound silence, and then he saw her breast heave suddenly.

She stood up and turned her face away and loosened her hands.

"I have the right to say that you *can* trust me—utterly," she said.

The red glow of the sunset was all about them now. He stood holding her hands and looking down at her with a kind of bewildered delight. Jealousy, except the immediate personal jealousy of a rival present in flesh and blood, was a passion absolutely unknown to Stuart; his nature was too objective for that. Where Lawrence would have driven himself mad with persistent imaginings he saw nothing but the facts—her presence.

"Constance!" repeating her name again

and again. "Constance!" And she was to be his wife.

And then I think it was that poor Jack indulged in the one piece of sentiment of his life.

"Do you remember that day on Mount Gerizim? You were very unkind to me that day, dearest," bending down and kissing her hair. "I asked you to do a great many things for me that day, and you would not. You would not even give me the flowers you wore; do you remember? and now you will give me this," touching the faded peach-blossoms in her dress. "I want it as a sign—a promise."

She looked at him and then down at the flowers. "I cannot give you these, Jack," she took them out of her dress and held them in her hand; "they are dead."

"But I can get you some others in a minute," said Stuart eagerly. He swung

himself lightly down the bank to where a belated cherry-tree spread its white boughs across the little river. The blossoms were over-blown, and fell and scattered at his touch. "I'll get them yet!" he called out gaily, trampling in amongst the river-reeds.

She held the faded blossoms in her hand and looked at them. It was all she had left. She crushed them against her lips with a sudden passionate gesture, and then her face grew quite white; she stretched out her hand slowly and let the poor dead flower fall into the stream. It caught for an instant among the grasses and then the water seized it and swept it out of sight.

"And I have brought you back nothing but empty hands," said Stuart. "The blossoms are all faded. I might have known it before I went after them. The spring is over now."

He took her hand in his and led her

away through the sunny garden. At first there was a trampled spot among the lily-leaves where their footsteps had pressed, but before long the freshness of the evening had lifted up the grass; the wind had blown away the scattered blossoms by the river; the thrush was singing once more in wild full-throated rapture—it was all as though they had never been.

CHAPTER X.

MIRAGE.

SOME two or three seasons have passed since then; but there are still a good many people in London who recollect the *furore* of admiration which raged for awhile in a certain artistic set the year Denis Lawrence brought back his pictures from the East. It is true that he had arrived there at a singularly fortunate moment, and when the critics were already beginning to inquire if there was nothing then in modern art between the production of pictures in every way adapted to the family circle and the

work of a school, the chief of which was like Lazarus—one risen from the dead, and with the scent of the grave about him?

Lawrence had not been in town a month before his name became the signal for discussion in the studios. People went and looked at his large picture (the "Study of a Jewess"), and came away and shook their heads. And all the men of genius, who had ideas they did not know how to paint said it was preposterous; and all the men of talent who knew exactly how to paint the ideas they did not have said it was rubbish. And then Mr. Lawrence sent his picture to the Academy.

It was accepted; it was hung on the line. And then more people went and looked at it; and at the dinner-parties, and between the entr'actes of the opera, all the young ladies asked their partners: "Who is this Mr. Lawrence?"

The answer varied. He came from New York, and had studied for years under Gerome at Paris; you found that out by looking at his drawing. He came from the South and had been a Confederate general. He was immensely wealthy, and painted for his own amusement. He had not a penny to his name, poor devil! and had been sent over by a charitable association: "You know they do those things in America."

And this went on for about a week.

There happened to be at that time a young man writing for a certain influential journal, by the name of Challoner. He was an enthusiastic fellow, and very anxious to distinguish himself, and he had met Lawrence in Paris and travelled up to London with him by the Dover mail. And so he sat down and wrote a review of the Academy exhibition, in which he demonstrated to his own entire satisfaction that the "Jewess"

was not only the most remarkable picture there, but one of the most remarkable pictures of modern times. Well, of course this made a great disturbance. There were other articles in other papers to prove that the "Jewess" was a daub, and counter articles on the opposite side to assert and maintain its pre-eminence.

And in the midst of all this confusion, someone discovered that the picture was absolutely not for sale.

And so in this way people concluded they had met a new genius in the young artist—and an American genius, which made it even more wonderful. He had two reception-days in the week by this time; his brother artists advised him to go and study in Rome; he could have spent his life refusing "private views;" in a word, his success was complete.

One afternoon, late in the season, a party

of three or four of us were standing before Lawrence's easel. It was the first time we had been thrown together, he and I, since the old Parisian days; I was struck by the change which had come over him since then. He seemed to me much older; not merely older in years, but in thought, in feeling, in aim—above all, in aim. He had become at once more positive and less serious in his way of looking at things. And there was something of sadness about him too, as in every imaginative man who has taken his own measure and learned by experience the limitation of his effort. He worked much harder, but he seemed to have less belief in his work; he was what the French call *détaché* from many things. "I have missed my chance somewhere," he said to me one day. "When was it? I cannot tell you, but something assures me that it is gone, and so—*Calypso s'est consolée du départ*

d'Ulysse" (with a laugh); "*moi, je me console de la réalité.*"

Of course these are not entirely my first impressions, but I recollect that even that afternoon he seemed to me to have lost to an extraordinary degree the expectation of life. Lawrence and I are very old friends, and I confess I watched him then with some curiosity.

Challoner was there too that afternoon, and he had brought some ladies with him. I was introduced to one of them, a Mrs. Sinclair; a very pretty woman, with large brown eyes, with which she made incessant play while she was speaking.

"But of all the things you have shown us, Mr. Lawrence, I think I enjoy and covet that head the most," she said now with a graceful movement of her fine shoulders.

It was a portrait which Lawrence had

just uncovered, and for a moment no one else spoke.

"You were thinking of the Mona Lisa in that background. I see," said Challoner after an interval of silence.

"It is wonderful, wonderful!" said Mrs. Sinclair, under her breath. She went nearer and looked at it more steadily. "Mr. Lawrence, you read Browning surely?"

"Why?" said Denis.

"Don't you remember it?" opening her beautiful eyes upon him suddenly; "why, that is the very expression Browning speaks of—

> ". . . only I discern
> Infinite passion and the pain
> Of finite hearts that yearn."

Mrs. Sinclair's voice was not the least of her attractions, and after this little bit of declamation it was felt that there was nothing

more to say. Lawrence saw his visitors safely out of the door of the other studio and came back; he found Challoner still standing before the portrait, looking at it with his head on one side, his hands in his pockets whistling softly to himself.

"I don't pretend to say you are always up to your own mark, Lawrence," he said argumentatively, "but when you do try for certain things, by Jove! there isn't another man in London can touch you. This head, now. There's a delicacy and a solidity in those flesh-tints; there's a strength and a sweetness in that modelling. Why, it's enough to make an ordinary man's reputatation as a portrait-painter. Finish it for the next R.A., like a good fellow, and won't I just give it a lift?"

"I can't. It's a portrait taken without the permission of the original," said Law-

rence. "I don't think it's a bad thing myself. But the original was better."

He moved the picture round into a more favourable light, and then I, too, began to look at it. It was my first impression of a face which was destined to become very dear and very familiar to me later on, and perhaps some vague presentiment of the fact made me examine it with more than ordinary attention.

It was the life-size study of a girl's head. The face was slightly turned aside; she was dressed in some dark tightly-fitting garment, and the eyes and forehead were shaded by a broad-brimmed cavalier's hat. Perhaps no better idea of the impression it produced could be given than by the lines which Mrs. Sinclair had quoted; for there was a singular suggestion of sadness about the grave sweet eyes and on the small close mouth, a suggestion very happily carried out in the

sentiment of the background. Only the face could be said to be finished. Behind it was a slight indication of pale luminous sky, a low horizon, a gleaming line of some strange water. The whole picture was full of this curious reflected light. The hands and the lower part of the figure were roughly blocked out, and it was characteristic of Denis that he had left the lower part of his canvas still uncovered.

"There is something curious about that sketch," he said now, looking at it meditatively. "There are days when I hate it, and have to turn it to the wall not to run my palette-knife through it. There are days when it stares at me like a material reproach, the visible sign of my falling off."

He took a turn up and down the studio. "Talk about knowledge and all that sort of stuff," he began again, stopping in front of the picture, "why there is more in that head

—more expressed, not worked out, mind you—than I can reach again by studying twenty years for it. The thing is an accident, the mere expression of an influence," he said moodily, "it isn't a measure of my work."

"But, my dear boy, all you have got to do is to fall in love with your next model if you can only paint by inspiration and all that sort of thing," said Challoner.

I happened to be looking at Denis, and I saw him change colour at the speech.

"Confound your falling in love!" he said hastily; "you don't suppose I was ever in love with that girl, do you?" He bent down and looked more closely at the portrait. "She is married now," he said. "It's three years or more since that head was painted, and full two years since I saw the notice of her wedding in an old news-

paper. I remember I was at Bagdad at the time."

The girl's face interested me, and I asked who it was she had married.

"A man by the name of Stuart. A good sort of fellow, too; but with about as many brains as your little finger and rather less imagination. From something she told me one day—the very day I got the hint for that portrait, by-the-way—I imagine she had been in love with him for some time—for several years, in fact. I suppose she thought him handsome—and so he was—but a man of that calibre can only be interesting while he is desperately in love. In the ordinary wear and tear of life—— Ah well! 'Allah is great, no doubt, and Juxtaposition his prophet!'"

"Well, I don't know. I should not have thought that girl would have made that kind of mistake," said Challoner thought-

fully. Why," looking up from his cigar with a yawn, "why she would have done better to have taken a fancy to you, Lawrence."

"Ah well! but then you see she never did," lightly; "but I think," said Lawrence, with sudden seriousness, "I think she had one of the noblest natures it has ever been my privilege to meet."

We spoke of something else after that; Lawrence wanted me to go and dine with him at his club, I remember.

"I won't promise you anything particularly wonderful in the way of a dinner; they are getting deuced careless with their cooking of late; but old Ferris will be there," he said, "and another man I want you to meet—a capital fellow I knew in the East. I know you will like him—a man by the name of Davenant."

It was only as we were all going out

sentiment of the background. Only the face could be said to be finished. Behind it was a slight indication of pale luminous sky, a low horizon, a gleaming line of some strange water. The whole picture was full of this curious reflected light. The hands and the lower part of the figure were roughly blocked out, and it was characteristic of Denis that he had left the lower part of his canvas still uncovered.

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It was only as we were all going out

of the studio together that Challoner spoke of the picture again.

"You can say what you like, Lawrence, but, by Jove! I stick to my own opinion," he said doggedly, stopping to take a last look at the portrait of Constance. "I'll bet you a hundred pounds that such a face was never intended to belong to a woman without a name and a history?"

"Then you would lose your money, my dear fellow, let me tell you," Lawrence answered carelessly. "As for the name, if I ever decide to finish it, I shall call it 'Mirage;' but it is a face without a history."

The door shut noisily behind them, filling the empty old house with a hollow echoing sound. And then the room grew very quiet. For a little while the pale afternoon light made a glimmering space about the window, the colour slowly fading out

of picture and carpet and stuff. It lingered for a moment more on the sad sweet face of Constance, and then that too faded away into the deepening night.

THE END.

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